GERVASE

BY MABEL DEARMER

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2018 with funding from
University of Toronto

https://archive.org/details/gervase00dear

Mar

~~120~~
25

L. Taylor

August 1910.

GERVASE

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

THE NOISY YEARS.

THE ORANGERY: A COMEDY OF TEARS.

BROWNJOHN'S.

THE DIFFICULT WAY.

THE ALIEN SISTERS.

GERVASE

BY

MABEL DEARMER

AUTHOR OF 'THE ALIEN SISTERS,' ETC.

Toronto

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY OF CANADA, LTD.

Copyright in the United States of America, 1909.

CONTENTS

BOOK I.—CHILDHOOD

CHAP.		PAGE
1.	Dealing principally with the psychology of the baby, but containing the root of the whole matter	3
2.	The child	10
3.	Death, and Mrs. Willoughby Fairfax	21
4.	Introduces Emma Souls and some others	34
5.	In which the hero displays the qualities of his defects	52
6.	The boy	69
7.	Ad interim	86
8.	On the threshold	101

BOOK II.—YOUTH

9.	Oxford	123
10.	The leaven works	130
11.	Lady Sarah Beverley	136
12.	The missionary	141
13.	The soul of Miriam	157
14.	The blind leads the blind	170

CHAP. PAGE

15. The ditch 189
16. King's Stratton receives the news . . . 196
17. In which Gervase is waylaid by a day-dream . 200
18. The trap 219
19. The trap closes 238

BOOK III.—MATURITY

20. Kate 263
21. In which Gervase meets with sympathy . . 277
22. In which fate disposes of all previous arrangements 289
23. Blue and orange 300
24. The house 314
25. Which precipitates the crisis 326
26. King of the world 342
27. Mark Hassall intervenes 353
28. Shadows 365
29. 'Chaos of thought and passion all confused' . 371
30. Il n'y a de vrai que l'amour 382
31. Lady Brereton has an idea . . . 390
32. 'For every evil under the sun' . . . 401
33. Everybody 411
34. The only way possible 427
35. The end 439

BOOK I

CHILDHOOD

CHAPTER I

DEALING PRINCIPALLY WITH THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THE BABY, BUT CONTAINING THE ROOT OF THE WHOLE MATTER

A BAR of sunlight lay across the ceiling and the baby stared at it. It pleased him because it brought with it a sense of familiarity: it had been there before, and the baby had lain in his cradle and had looked at it.

He did not consider the light from an æsthetic point of view, he only recognised in it a condition of things that had been before, and his pleasure lay in the sense of this recognition. He crowed and stretched his limbs luxuriously: by virtue of his memory of it that bar of light belonged to him. The world had been to him until quite lately only a series of recurring impressions; but as they begot in him remembrance, he realised himself, and them. He owned his world. He stretched out his limbs to feel his strength and crowed afresh.

He was a healthy baby and his sensations were mostly pleasant. He was chiefly conscious of power: a growing force within him made him

push his limbs about. At regular intervals he experienced an intense physical desire, which was followed by an equally intense satisfaction, as new and delicious life streamed into him ; and through him into his entire world, colouring and altering it.

On the other hand, owing to the intensity of the pulse of life that throbbed in him, his sorrows were as poignant as his joys. If the machinery of digestion did not work smoothly—and being a new instrument, and unused, there was occasionally a hitch in it—his pains were excruciating : nothing mitigated them, for, when the mind cannot conceive of a future, the power of the present moment, for good or for ill, is terrific : with the whole force of his life he delivered himself up to grief.

Then, in exact proportion to his excitement in new mental impressions, there came to him periods of dejection, when black darkness surrounded him. Sometimes he was awake when this moment fell upon him, sometimes he slept ; but whenever it came, it brought with it a vague craving, a restlessness, and above all a fear. Then he cried out, and stretched his thin red arms to some sort of a god, whom he found always near at hand and wonderfully ready to respond to his desires. If this misery dropped upon him during his hours of wakefulness, his nurse grew anxious as to his health ; but when it came in sleep and caused him to moan quietly, she said, 'Look, the baby is dreaming !' He was however neither ill nor dreaming : the life-power in him was merely using his mind intensely as it used his body, and he paid in this way for each new mental experience.

His time was fully occupied: his nights and days were crowded with incident. He did not distinguish between sleeping and waking, dreams and reality, because his life at this period was merely subjective. But the same events passed him in an orderly procession, and as by degrees he learnt to recognise and look for them, so they became dear and familiar. Sometimes they displeased him, and then he manifested his objection in indignant grief: but such a demonstration was a thing apart from his constitutional attacks of depression; violent and vociferous as it was, he rather enjoyed it, although he paid for the expenditure of nervous energy by a subsequent period of exhaustion.

It was only lately that he had begun to distinguish people and things as separate entities, and to learn the meaning of a joke. His five senses had awakened simultaneously but very gradually, and after them there now came a sixth —the sense of humour. As yet he knew nothing of the theological virtues. Countless objects now occupied him in turn and filled him with a strange satisfaction: his brain was growing, his sensations quickening, he had become enormously interested in the world. People around him said: 'Gervase Alleyne is a peaky baby, but he seems to have all his wits about him, and when he laughs he laughs with all his heart.'

He laughed now, for a great bluebottle had walked suddenly across the bar of sunshine, and he had noticed that before. Seen but dimly, the bluebottle struck him also as a peculiarly humorous object, made entirely in order to create laughter.

Any reference to Gervase Alleyne, either within the household to which he belonged or in the village beyond it, held always a note of sympathy both for him and for a near relation, a man on whom he had never set his eyes.

'Poor Squire!' said the inhabitants of King's Stratton: 'Poor Mr. Alleyne—sad to think he never saw his son!'

Of that loss, which accounted for his premature birth, and in part for his mother's subsequent ill-health, Gervase was blithely ignorant. He laughed at bluebottles and his own private jokes, stretched his limbs, which as time went on grew firm and rounded, pulled his mother's hair and patted her face in easy sovereignty; while she for her part held him tight and close against her heart to prevent it from breaking utterly. Mary Alleyne's life had in reality ended on that day when the village of King's Stratton stood silent and bare-headed to watch its Squire, John Alleyne, carried up the main street from the hunting-field to his own house, dead upon a stretcher. She never recovered from the shock of that terrible home-coming. But although what remained was but the mere appearance of that Lady Mary Alleyne so intimately known to the old and the unhappy in King's Stratton, life of a sort still lived in her, fed by the presence of the child, in whom she still touched the outward circumstance of that almighty sacrament of love, the realisation of which had been something almost beyond her strength.

Delicate, and fragile almost to an infirmity,

possessed of a fine intellect and a singular charm of presence, Mary Alleyne had, notwithstanding the drawing power of her personality, married late in life ; and so frail was she physically that after marriage it was only her husband's will which held her back from a state of chronic disablement. He, however, refused to allow her to be ailing, and she moved obedient to his imperious purpose and equally imperious passion. This weakness, however, was only physical : in spiritual things—and hers was a nature whose most vivid experiences were found on this plane—she was most vitally alert. She followed the rule of the religious life, as she had been taught to interpret it, with an unswerving and passionate loyalty. It made up the sum of her happiness. Her love for her husband and her child had been part of it, consecrated and offered up to God. There had been no clash in her of two ideals, for to her mind the material was but the texture of the spiritual, sanctified by the central fact of her creed—the lifting of the human into the divine. In her, the two worlds, united and yet eternally apart, the paradox of which has baffled philosophers and tortured saints, were easily at one. This was the principal fact about her : it stood isolated and emphatic. Mary Alleyne's eye was single : she took the world very simply.

Her husband, on the other hand, took the world simply also, but from the opposite standpoint. He was an honest materialist, for whom the things from which his wife drew her very being did not exist. He had been born into a Church

system and a theology which he accepted but did not pretend to make his own in any profound sense of the word. If he worshipped anything he worshipped his wife, not only with his body but with his soul also : for him she was the ultimate excellence and the morning stars. At every point she amazed him ; and when, metaphorically, she had taken away his breath and tumbled him down upon his knees, she then, to his further stupefaction, humbled herself beyond reason to the very dust—loving him so devoutly and relying upon him in such tender helplessness, that he was forced to fill his proper place once more, and stand a strong protector ready to shield her from the world.

It must be stated, but only as a matter of comparatively remote importance, that Mary Alleyne had discovered qualities in her husband that puzzled her profoundly ; but then he was the only man she had ever loved, or indeed had ever known with any degree of comradeship, and she took her want of comprehension as one of the disabilities of her sex. Arguing from the particular to the general, she supposed that on one side the masculine nature was always violent, undisciplined, and barely civilised : but she did not put it to herself in this way. Such a criticism, based upon observation of her own husband, would have seemed to her irreverent, and grossly unfair to all in him that made for wisdom,—right judgment in many things, strength, endurance and unqualified courage. She accepted his unbridled temper, his bouts of violent passion, and his undeviating self-

will, as the defects of his qualities and part of the masculine heritage.

Of Gervase's mother it might well have been said :—

> Her speech truth knows not from her thought,
> Nor love her body from her soul.

Of his father, notwithstanding his integrity, his high honour, and even in a sense the nobility of his violence, it was difficult to predicate any soul at all ; unless soul were an intense mental activity ready to reach out beyond the grave to a final resurrection of the flesh.

Out of the intermingling of these two lives —the one fundamentally of the earth, the other of the spirit, each eternally opposed to each, and only held together by the attraction of opposites —was born the baby in the cradle, Gervase Alleyne. From these two natures, so simple in their essence, so complex in their union, had been evolved a third, a being, whose soul must, by its very incarnation, become the meeting-ground of forces but dimly dreamt of. A facile prophecy, taking into account these antecedents, might well forecast an existence at variance with itself, a thing half God, half brute, yet wholly human.

But the baby, knowing nothing of the projects of Time, lay in his cradle and laughed at the ponderous bluebottle and the bar of sunlight.

CHAPTER II

THE CHILD

In later years, looking back upon his first recollections, Gervase Alleyne found himself endowed with an amazing power of memory. The strength of his mental life, which at that time showed itself in receptivity, was such that most of the impressions that then came to him were indelible. He had not only absorbed but retained them. On reflection, however, he doubted where he was most sure, so much so that sometimes he wondered if he were not, after all, merely the dupe of a vivid imagination. He remembered, for instance, the labour of early speech, the hesitation, the searching for the word and finally the impatience and the breakdown into tears when it was not forthcoming. He remembered also how the difficulty of walking was mitigated by the intense delight of feeling his feet upon the ground. Then the sense of his strength overwhelmed him: he drew his breath in gasps: when he stood against a chair, alone for the first time, he was convinced that no created thing could stand against him.

Gervase, as a man, recollected the fleeting

impressions of those days as clearly as he remembered his work of the day before yesterday—the touch of his mother's skin, the smell of linen airing before the fire, the shudder caused by the prickle of woollen boots, the taste of his warm bath sponge, and more vividly than any of these, the enormous satisfaction of his meals: sleep he resented, and fought against with his entire strength. He remembered how, when he cried at being put into his cradle, the tears fell down his neck and into his hair and ears: he remembered also the unpleasant sensation of a wet pillow.

His first walking dress was a pelisse that apparently was too long, for it tripped him up continually, so that he fell forward on to his nose. But he was so occupied in realising his strength, and the supreme importance and bustle contingent on putting one foot in front of the other, that he forgot to be annoyed; indeed, he hardly noticed the shock, but picked himself up again and again, with an infinite patience. Also he had acquired great aptitude in falling, and knew exactly how to put his arms forward, so as to protect his face. During his morning walks, he was principally interested in particular stones in the gravel path, and a tiny yellow shell that he came upon at intervals; this shell always thrilled him, so that on finding it he forgot to walk, but sat down suddenly and heavily to consider his prize. All around him was vastness, lovely noises and delicious smells; but the stones and the yellow shells were things peculiarly his own and touched with glamour. The fact that he was short-sighted accounted for

the specialised character of these morning walks: this he discovered later, when he began to think that memory had played him false by means of the imagination. Still he was convinced that he could never have imagined the shapes of those brown and yellow stones just washed by rain, or the perpetual clatter of the unseen birds above his head—for he took his morning walk in the avenue, with great indistinguishable trees on either side full of the clang and the disturbance of a rookery. In looking back he decided that his first realisation of the outside world must have been in the winter, which fact would account for the long pelisse and the gravel path. Later on that covering was dispensed with; and he fell forward no more, but strutted joyfully with head erect. He then wore blue shoes. For the rest of his attire memory failed him, but on his death-bed he might, if questioned, have sworn to the blue shoes. The wonders of the gravel path were now replaced by grass, warm and sweet-smelling; and instead of the yellow shells he found among the thick greenery, daisies, and sometimes small red leaves. These he studied minutely, picking them to pieces, smelling them, rubbing them on his face, or eating them. Usually he held them tightly in his hands, until they had become hot and bruised; and when he had gathered more than he could hold, he stuffed the remainder into his white dress, which, according to the fashion of those days, was cut low about the neck.

Once a strange thing happened: he found a small green frog: it was clammy and he ex-

perienced no desire to sniff at it, or put it in his mouth, as he did with leaves or even stones, but he wished ardently to keep it. It frightened him by its struggles, but then his sense of power reassured him, and he pinched it to keep it quiet. He sat silent, holding it in his hand for nearly half an hour. He did not want his nurse to deprive him of this booty. When she, wondering at his stillness, questioned him, he did not betray his secret, but pushed the frog with the other things into the bosom of his dress, and in order to keep up appearances, went off to play. He played conventionally, looking at his nurse from time to time. He was entirely preoccupied: aware of the presence of the frog just above his sash, he felt weighted by an enormous secret. At dinner-time it was forgotten.

During this period of his life, nothing broke his happiness: the attacks of depression that had come to him in early infancy were suspended: he was perfectly well and perfectly happy, except for occasional violent bursts of temper, and in these he felt his strength, so that he did not, on the whole, dislike them. He shouted then with his whole soul, and used his limbs in a windmill frenzy. In the sleep that followed he looked like one of the *Innocenti*, while his mother, who sat watching him in some exhaustion, wondered above all else at the way of a child.

In the early morning, and before and after his midday sleep, he discovered facts about his bed: a prick on his cheek meant a feather quill, and if his fingers were skilful enough, it emerged from

the pillow, long and golden, or else tiny, and white, and fluffy. At the same time he found out that his blankets were covered with hairs, which made strange monstrous shapes, when seen against the light through half-shut eyelids. In this his short-sightedness was evident. His coverlet was also within the range of his vision, and the pattern interested him ; it was made by small white balls, which could, with enormous effort, be picked off. Gervase never quite made up his mind about the tenacity of these white balls, because in after years, when staying in an old-fashioned country house he came across a similar counterpane, and from a kind of curiosity, or perhaps a reversion to old habit, spent some minutes in endeavouring to detach one of them ; it remained however obstinately fixed.

His next memory was more dramatic. It must have been winter, for he wore a red tight-fitting coat, and gloves. He was standing near the stables, and by the steps of the coach-house there crouched something that looked at him—something black and slim, with beady malicious eyes. He stood terrified, transfixed, unable to speak or move, until with a gigantic effort he pulled up all his strength to a stamp of the foot. The movement was very feeble, for his limbs were bound by fear, and there was a weight upon his chest which suffocated him. It was all he could achieve. But it was enough : in a flash the animal was gone.

Then Gervase threw up his arms and shouted : he was as triumphant as Don Quixote at the flight of the giants. He told his mother afterwards that

he had frightened away a lion : he wished to give her some idea of the magnitude of his emotion and his triumph. But she, unreasonably to his mind, set forth the dangers of romance. He held to his story ; and indeed in substance it was correct, the accidents were irrelevant. He learned afterwards that the creature had been a rat.

Thus he grew up through the stages of baby-hood to the age of six years, and all this time the world had been emerging out of mist. His perceptions became sharper: his impressions were now gathered from a wider range of incident, he was sensible of a more complex world.

In appearance he was not commonplace, neither was he particularly handsome. Tall for his age, with well-formed limbs, he held his head courageously ; but his short-sighted eyes gave to his expression a sort of impassivity. He was not quick to answer the smile or frown of a companion, but that was from the simple reason that he was unaware of either. His features were almost too delicate—the arched bow of his mouth and the full drooping under-lip were better suited to a girl, so also was the delicate contour of the cheek and throat—but, in the sweep of the brow that bent above the flashing short-sighted blue eyes, there lay dominant qualities. His hands, though tapering, were strong and eager, showing in their make a certain petulance. His skin was as white and his hair as golden as a princess's in a fairy-tale. He had inherited from his mother a vibrating personality, and child though he was, it was impossible not to realise his presence, although he

might be playing silently in a room full of grown-up people. The force of his life was such that even at that age he infected others with his moods.

And Gervase Alleyne had many moods, for which there was no accounting. At the age of four, or perhaps earlier, the depression that had assailed his infancy dropped upon him once more, this time never to be beyond the power of return until his death. He had strong animal spirits, and when the world smiled—or rather when he smiled upon the world, because his moods were dependent upon no outward circumstance—he could scarcely compass his joy. He moved in an ecstasy, laughed, sang, shouted, whistled, and became rebellious from sheer excess of life. In this mood he would stop in his play to fling himself into his mother's arms and whisper, 'O Mum, I am so fearfully happy; I simply don't know what to do!' Then his mother would hold him tightly, as though to shield him from the inevitable future.

But even then the heritage of his temperament was upon him: even then he found other difficult days when he battled with a sense of futility, and instead of a little beating heart felt within him a dumb and horrible pain. This he decided was a stomach-ache. Exceptionally free from physical ailments, he found other children fretful for this cause, therefore he explained his own fretfulness by a like word. Holding his hands upon his heart he would declare, 'I've got such a dreadful stomach-ache.' At other times he said simply, 'Nurse, I want!' But when questioned as to

his desire the boy was silent. He did not know what he wanted. But he was forced to reply, so his mind instantly conceived something forbidden and out of reach. 'I want an air-gun,' he would say stoutly. It stood for the unattainable.

Such a temperament, knowing potentially the extremes of joy and pain, is bound, sooner or later, and for a longer or shorter period as the case may be, to take refuge in religion. And Gervase already at six years old showed signs of a distinct gift—a genius almost—for the religious life. This tendency in him was watched over and fostered by his mother. Lady Mary Alleyne had been brought up in the atmosphere of that part of the Church of England which is Catholic rather than Protestant, and she obeyed its precepts faithfully, attending its daily services, and fasting on its appointed days. She was perfectly clear as to her opinions. If the Kingdom of Heaven was an inward kingdom of the heart, it was also, she was convinced, the Church of Christ upon earth, and more particularly that branch of the Church of Christ to which she belonged. Therefore little Gervase had what might be called a distinctively 'Church' training. He accepted it eagerly, and already in his small way put its lessons into practice. His nurse, however, was a Salvationist, and Lady Mary was hardly aware how much this woman had supplemented her own careful and purposely limited instructions. Morning and afternoon Moody and Sankey's hymns, which took for granted a doctrine that was contrary to

all that Lady Mary believed in and taught, might have been heard in her nurseries. The boy sang them lustily and applied them to his games.

'*Ho, my comrades, see the signal waving in the sky.*' Gervase would shout out the words as he trundled his train filled with soldiers. '*Reinforcements now appearing, victory is nigh.*' He delighted in the violent imagery.

A great part of the nursery conversation turned upon the tortures of the damned and the bliss of the elect, and in both of these subjects Gervase took undying interest; but more particularly, perhaps, in the peculiar circumstances of the damned. His nurse at this time created for him an invisible imaginary personage called 'The Lord.' This was a being who overheard all conversations and took an exceptional interest in the doings of people when left to themselves. He was capricious, but if called upon with sufficient pertinacity, sometimes deigned to help a friend in a difficulty. In the night-nursery over her bed the nurse had hung up a picture of a single eye, and this Gervase understood was 'The Eye of the Lord,' which was 'in every place.' He pictured a fantastic but kindly deity, with one eye in the middle of his forehead, whose chief attribute was insatiable curiosity. Both he and his nurse prayed to 'The Lord' many times a day, and Gervase prayed whenever he was alone in the nursery to appease the Eye. His prayers were practical, and referred always to his interest of the moment.

'O Lord, please make this train's funnel straight. It has been twisted somehow and I can't bend it.

Thou knowest all things. Forever—randever—ramen.'

But in reality Gervase worshipped a multiplicity of gods, and each was associated in his mind with a different place. Once out of the nursery 'The Lord' was forgotten. 'God,' whom he worshipped in the fields, was an entirely different being, one who he had been told had made the world. Therefore when Gervase sang lustily in church, 'All ye green things upon the earth, bless ye the Lord, praise him and magnify him for ever,' he did not mean that 'Lord' who inspected continually the small life of the nursery, but the great 'God' who made the clouds and rode upon the thunder.

However, in his mother's sitting-room, when talking to her or listening to stories, both 'The Lord' and 'God' were equally passed over, and Gervase's mind became full of the doings of saints and angels, martyrs and apostles. The child thought of these personages radiant in the golden streets of Heaven, always smiling, and beautifully dressed, playing with their special toys—gridirons, Catherine wheels, and little model churches—while angels with rainbow wings pelted them with roses. There were many pictures of Heaven in his mother's room. It was a place of light, colour, sweet smells, wildly-enchanting music, grass greener than any earthly grass, marvellous flowers to be had for the picking, strange lovely friendly beasts, and a perpetual rainbow. This was Heaven. There were pictures, too, of the angels who lived there, and who sat in the trees like the rooks, singing

sweetly, and playing on violins or small organs. These angels were blue or rose coloured, like the rose-coloured curtains in his mother's room, and this room was more like Heaven than any place he knew. There was no rainbow, but there was a smell of roses in it, and Gervase was quite sure that Heaven would smell of roses. 'And you are like an angel too, dearest,' he said one day to Lady Mary; 'an old angel,' he added, strictly truthful, 'and rather an ill one.'

His mother, to his surprise, laughed at the remark.

CHAPTER III

DEATH, AND MRS. WILLOUGHBY FAIRFAX

In the following year Gervase faced his first grief. His mother died. For many months she had resisted successfully the onset of a disease which is seldom mentioned by those who suffer from it, because its very name spells the end of human achievement, and is in itself a doom. Mary Alleyne strove with all her might to evade the death-sentence, not so much for herself as for the boy, but at last weariness broke her will and she could think only of how best to bear the pain. This she did royally. Nobody knew how much she suffered, or indeed if she suffered at all.

'Mother is a little tired to-day,' Gervase would say gravely to his nurse; 'the trains must be shunted into sidings, for she does not wish for too much traffic in the nursery.'

Then at last the hour came when rest was no longer a mere figure of speech. Mary Alleyne rested in very deed and truth, and the traffic in the room overhead continued unrebuked. Up and down went the trains, whistling shrilly as though glad to be released from the ban of silence.

Mrs. Willoughby Fairfax, Gervase's aunt and only near relation, had come to stay in the house at this time, therefore it became her duty to break the news to the boy. She disliked doing this extremely : the tall golden-haired child with the short-sighted blue eyes disconcerted her in a manner that would have been ridiculous if it had not been so annoying. The springs of his character were sealed to her. She could not account for him, and, priding herself upon her knowledge of human nature—a second-hand knowledge derived principally from the reading of novels—felt uncomfortable. Gervase turned an impenetrable front to her probings, for instinctively, in the way of a child, he realised the position and rejoiced. He did not like his aunt. He compared her to a milliner's dummy he had once seen in a shop at Harboard, the nearest town to King's Stratton. To him she seemed to be all exterior, with a loud voice that rattled about inside her ; and yet from this emptiness there emanated at that time something antagonistic, almost ferocious. He was miserable in her presence. Once after she had volunteered a sudden sweeping ridicule which the boy had met with silence, she asked him what he was thinking of.

'You,' he replied slowly : 'I'm thinking that you will go to hell when you die.' The idea did not shock him ; he was gravely contemplative.

The lady lost control of herself. There was no precedent that she could remember for a reply to such a remark. She had no time to think of modelling her behaviour on that of anybody

else, for she had already, beyond recall, lost her temper.

'Little wretch,' she screamed in a fury, 'you are mad! Get away and don't let me see your ugly little face again. Don't poke at me with your blind eyes.' Her words, uttered in an access of rage, took unwonted force and colour from her passion.

The boy left her smiling. Such behaviour was exactly what might have been expected of a lost soul. He told his nurse as much at tea-time, but to his surprise the good woman was horrified at this application of her teaching. Conventional as the lady herself, she regarded Mrs. Willoughby Fairfax as beyond criticism. A lady belonging to that class of persons designated below stairs as 'the best families' was one whom nurse would not presume to judge. Heaven and hell could not be thought of in connection with such people. The boy should have known better. 'Eat your tea, Master Gervase, and mind your words,' she said severely; '"he that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."'

Gervase crammed his mouth full of bread and jam, but held to his own opinion.

After the unpleasant episode with Mrs. Willoughby Fairfax, which Gervase christened 'the Discovery,' he evaded his aunt ostentatiously. When she came into a room by one door he slipped out by another. When she passed him on the stairs he stood flat against the wall, as though he might already catch fire from contact with her skirts. She declared that he was mad,

and that he watched her with glaring eyes—but in this she was deceived herself, for the boy, owing to his infirmity, could not see her.

And now after 'the Discovery,' although naturally she did not know of any such naming, and would not have understood it had she done so, she was extremely loath to be the one to tell the child of his mother's death. The idea was most harassing to her susceptibilities. She was sure that there would be a scene—there always was on such occasions. Not that she objected to that particularly, because a scene that she was prepared for, and had rehearsed in imagination, would have appealed, she felt sure, to the best side of her nature; but with a child like Gervase anything might happen. She did not know how to begin. She tried honestly to turn her dislike into pity for the orphan; but this was difficult, for the orphan did not know that he was to be pitied, and his spirits were aggressive.

'Poor ignorant, badly brought-up child!' she said tragically to herself, as though to an audience, 'how can I strike him!'

She hunted a method of striking him mercifully, and according to a good precedent, and at last she discovered one. It was the method adopted by the heroine in a book she had just finished—a heroine of great delicacy and refinement. She arrayed herself, according to the example given her, in the new mourning that had just arrived from town. Having bestowed on her reflection in the mirror such a scrutiny as assured her that the dress was all it should be, she sent for the boy.

Gervase stood with his hands in the pockets of his blue blouse.

'Do you want me, Aunt Judith?'

'Yes, dear,' replied the lady, 'I have to tell you something very sad.' She paused, for the boy made no sign. 'You see I have got on a black dress—mourning?'

'Is that sad?'

'Yes, dear, very sad. Let me tell you the reason.'

'I don't want to hear it. I—I would much rather not.' The boy stammered — suddenly frightened. His aunt gloomed portentously above him, brandishing a mystery. Shrouded as she was in black, he felt her as a malignant presence.

'Don't tell me, don't tell me.' He shrank against the door, putting his fingers in his ears. 'I want to go to nurse.'

'Gervase!' His aunt advanced; taking his cold unwilling hands, she drew him towards her. With all his strength he tugged in the other direction. 'Gervase,' she said again plaintively, content for one moment to be herself and to shelve the painful duty; 'why do you dislike me so much?'

This was not included in the example she had set herself, but it was a question she burned to ask.

The boy ceased wriggling and considered it gravely.

'Because you look so awful, and—oh—' the last words came with a rush, 'you smell so nasty.'

'Gervase!' Mrs. Willoughby Fairfax quivered

in every nerve with shame and indignation. Her heavily-scented pocket-handkerchief fell to the ground, but she was unconscious of it. 'What a rude thing to say!'

'I don't care if it's rude or not! You do—and I want to go to nurse.'

The lady bridled. It would be ridiculous, she thought, to be worsted in this manner by an ill-bred child. Her pity for him was drowned in a quick anger. Mary always spoiled him so horribly! She was back upon the duty now; it should lay by no longer, she determined; she would deal with it to the best of her ability and in a manner this time her own. Little beast! her news would not hurt him much, she felt sure of that: he was as hard as nails!

'Gervase, you know how ill your dear mother has been lately?'

'Yes.' In spite of himself the quick tears filled the boy's eyes; but his pride stopped their flow; staring fixedly at the woman, he winked them away.

'That's something else,' he said proudly but uncomfortably, 'something different. Why don't you go on about the other?'

'I am going on. Your dear mamma——'

'You said you had something to tell me,—the reason you are wearing black. Oh, why *don't* you go on?' Fear rather than anger made him stamp his foot; his emotion was complex; a sense of imminent danger was upon him.

'Very well, I will go on.' Aunt Judith's mood was now more simple than the boy's. She broke

the news baldly, brutally, in sheer anger. 'Gervase, your mother is dead.'

The child's heart, it seemed, hit him; his throat contracted and something muffled his senses. This then was the unknown thing, the sense of which had terrified him from the first. It was upon him at the moment, towering into infinity—so stupendous was it, that he missed it somehow, and, curiously enough, with his next breath more easily drawn, he knew his evasion. Down a side alley he trifled with curiosity—blinking the horror, yet strangely aware that it still awaited him.

Dead! Part of his brain—a small part—was more alert than usual, as though it tried by extra activity to do the work of that which remained inert and stunned.

'Dead!' he spoke placidly, while his eyes wandered; 'then she is in heaven!'

For a moment Mrs. Willoughby Fairfax remained silent from astonishment. It struck her that the boy had not his full share of wits, and indeed at that moment her surmise was no more than the truth. 'That accounts for his insolence,' she said to herself; 'the poor child is not all there.'

'Yes, Gervase,' she said aloud, pulling the long ends of the black lace scarf that was draped about her shoulders, and falling once more into conventional phraseology: 'The Lord has taken your dear mamma to live with Him.' She had the grace to falter, although the words fell glibly from her lips.

The boy was conscious of something grotesque in her attitude.

'Do *you* know The Lord?' he asked, his whole face turned in incredulous inquiry.

Mrs. Willoughby Fairfax was thrown out. She had absolutely nothing to say. Her ideas must once more be marshalled according to some good model, and she groaned at the prospect. What a child! No young person should be permitted to be so disconcerting—of that she was convinced. In picturing this scene beforehand she had imagined something piteous but inexpressibly tender, an opportunity for gentle tears and kisses mixed with prayers. She could have wept with the little weeper, and if the boy, broken down by the weight of grief, had but turned to her for comfort, he would not have found it far to seek. But this child wanted no comfort; he remained passive, and plied her with irritating questions.

'Do *you* know The Lord?'

Then a desperate remedy for this horrible callousness suggested itself to Mrs. Willoughby Fairfax. It was entirely her own, and she felt somewhat appalled at her temerity, but for good or for evil she intended now to make an impression on the child. 'It is only right,' she argued to herself. 'He does not understand. Well, he shall be made to understand.'

'Gervase, follow me.' She spoke authoritatively.

The boy obeyed her, moving like a machine. Her news had dazed him. 'Mother is dead.' His lips repeated the extraordinary words as he went, but they brought no meaning to him.

Mrs. Willoughby Fairfax—a black rustling figure—stalked in front, and the small shrunken

child, with his hands in the belt of his blue smock, followed at a little distance. 'Mother is dead, mother is dead!' His lips moved incessantly, while that part of his brain which remained alert was more ready to receive transitory impressions than ever before; it engraved these impressions on his memory with a precision that was almost painful.

A square of sunlight fell upon a picture in the gallery by Teniers: it represented a drinking party, one drunken man sat holding a leering girl upon his knee, while another, with a red feather in his cap, leant across the table to chaff the couple.

'That is an ugly picture!' thought Gervase, 'what ugly red men. I must ask mother about it. Oh, I forgot—mother is dead!'

'Mother is dead! Mother is dead!' Down the corridor they went, one behind the other—like soldiers, Gervase thought. They reached a Persian rug that pleased him particularly; it was so soft, it always slipped on the polished boards. Gervase now gave a little run and slid as usual. Then his aunt turned and looked at him; grief, anger, and horrified surprise showed in her eyes.

The boy flinched; somehow the nameless horror had drawn nearer. He walked on cowed, and did not dare to slide again.

At last they came to his mother's room; it had double doors; his aunt opened the outer door, and then turning, looked at him once more and laid a finger on her lip. He was close now to the darkness. Taking her outstretched hand, and this time glad to get it, he followed her into the room.

He was met by the thick sweet scent of lilies;

it was unusual, but it did not surprise him, for by this time he was entirely stunned, even his curiosity had died away.

The bed stood in the middle of the room, with tall candles burning at the head and foot. His mother lay easily, a crucifix on her bosom and lilies all about her. Gervase stood still and stared, fingering his belt. He made by his presence there a bizarre sight. The dead woman's face was smooth, smiling ivory. The child resented the smile, he resented the mystery and silence. Life within him, without his knowledge, made the eternal shuddering protest at the presence of Death: 'What have I to do with thee? Get thou behind me.'

His aunt sank on her knees by the bedside and prayed, but Gervase was too dazed to pray—besides, to whom should he pray? The gods of his imagination could not help him here. He might ask 'The Lord' to mend a broken train, but not to raise the dead to life. There was something blasphemous in the thought. He turned away from the kneeling woman, in a sort of helplessness, and looked about the room. Its detail forced itself upon him: there was the antique ebony wardrobe, on which was carved in high relief a plump and laughing virgin, holding in her arms an equally plump and laughing child, to whom mischievous Cupid-like boy-angels brought a cross tied up with ribbon bows and streamers; the rosy curtains, the pale walls, the picture of himself as a baby in a white frock with coral bows, the large square miniature of his

father that stood always on a table by the bed with a little lamp before it. The lamp was not burning now; Lady Mary had no further need for it. All this he noticed, and, familiar as it was, it had now grown strange; he saw it through the haze of a new atmosphere, the atmosphere of death. Then he returned, still vaguely, to the quiet wax-like figure on the bed.

'Mother is dead!' he repeated, 'mother is dead!' And spoken in that presence, the words took on, suddenly, significance. With that sight before him they penetrated the heaviness of life, the weight of habit, and the accumulation of common things, until they fell upon his bare soul.

'Mother is dead.' He knew now what it meant. He was alone. Warmth, comfort, sympathy, love, understanding, kisses, happy play-times were wiped out for ever. He was alone, an atom bobbing about in unmitigated vastness.

The knowledge fell upon him all at once and touched his very flesh. Physical agony coursed through him. He could not bear it; he turned suddenly and left the room. Once outside, he began to run, sticking his fingers in his ears as though to stifle his thoughts. His face worked as he went, but his eyes were dry; he would have shut them, only that instinctively he preserved his going. On and on he rushed down the corridor, where he had slid on the Persian rug, past the Teniers, down the great staircase, through the hall, across a drawing-room, and out into the garden. On he went, running with all his might, a terrible fire inside him that had mounted to his

brain, on and on with voices singing in his ears and confused lights before his eyes. At last he reached a quiet spot in the wild garden and dropped down at the foot of an ash tree.

Then all was still. It seemed that he had forgotten what had happened, or perhaps he slept.

When he woke up—it appeared to him to be a very long time afterwards—three people were watching him, compassionately : a gardener, Mrs. Willoughby Fairfax, and his nurse. Leaves were in his hair, and little sticks and bits of moss had made his blouse untidy ; his hands were dirty ; looking furtively at the nurse he put them behind him and then staggered to his feet. He was very cold and he felt sick. Nobody spoke. He put his hands to his head. 'What do you all want?' he said. They peered at him so strangely.

Then he remembered—Mother was dead. The whole thing was upon him once again, only this time its force was lessened. He could think now. A great hatred towards all created things rose up in him. Passion swayed him—the passion of blind anger. Then, far away from the world of things—grass and trees and soft breezes—the things that did not matter, he became aware that his aunt was speaking to him.

'Gervase, dear.' Mrs. Willoughby Fairfax was frightened by the result of her plan for making an impression upon her nephew, and her fear was now touched with pity—the child had more heart than she had thought possible. She put her arm round the rigid little form that shook.

'Gervase dear,' she felt more kindly towards him than ever before. 'God loves you so much. Can not you pray to Him to help you in this terrible trouble?' She had got the phrase from a book; it sounded extremely kind and consoling. It almost drew tears. But the boy pulled himself away and looked at her with sullen, smouldering eyes.

'I—hate—God!' he said slowly, 'and I hate The Lord too! I hate them worse than I hate you, Aunt Judith.'

The lady fell back, but the nurse, who had been standing by blubbering, now blew her nose finally and gathered her common sense together.

'Master Gervase dear,' she spoke briskly, 'you are not well. Come home with Nana and she will put you to bed.'

Gervase took her outstretched hand and walked away slowly, dragging back a little as he went.

Then he stopped short and for the first time his eyes filled with tears. He had a new problem to fight; he faltered and trembled afresh.

'Nana dear,' he said at last, piteously, 'I, I—Don't be angry with me—out-of-doors I mean—I can't help it. I am going to be sick!'

CHAPTER IV

INTRODUCES EMMA SOULS AND SOME OTHERS

It was middle summer. Earth, though sleeping, stirred in the sunshine, and in the silence of bird and beast the low hum of happy insect life could be discerned. In certain lights myriads of small flies passed along, making a slow moving wall, living, transparent, and ephemeral. Heat grew visible in vibration; it rose effervescing from the road which passed like a white river of sun-baked dust between King's Stratton and Weybourne. On this road, panting and perspiring, there tramped a woman. King's Stratton was some two miles behind her, and Weybourne Park, Sir James Brereton's place and her destination, lay only half a mile in front. But her going was impeded by her Louis Quinze heels, and her dress, according to the fashion of the day, dragged about the knees; she wore a black lace mantle, a small black bonnet — from which fell an apologetic widow's veil—and black kid gloves, which left a gap of hot red wrist visible between them and the sleeve. Her clothing was cheap, but there was about her, arising partly from the large

golden plait that crowned her forehead, a certain meretricious air of fashion, curiously out of harmony with the glare of sunshine, the dusty road, and the clear green hedges. It was as though a Parisian caricature had stepped suddenly into the simplicity of a Morland landscape. But Mrs. Henry Jason Arthur Souls was no Parisian. *Née* plain Emma Greening, she had, in the society of Portsmouth, and not in its most exclusive society, met Lieutenant Henry Jason Arthur Souls, R.N., a middle-aged officer who preserved the Jack-ashore traditions. It was not difficult for Emma, then in the first brilliance of the golden plait, to marry Lieutenant Souls, and she did so in the hope of bettering herself. At the end, however, not of the month, but of the first year, her husband being then on half-pay, she had desired to give notice in order to better herself again, and had realised to her sorrow that the law of the land was an obstacle in the way of her laudable ambition—a circumstance which apparently she had not taken into due account.

Meanwhile the qualities in Mr. Souls which had made him the easy conquest of Emma Greening, continued (as despite his undoubted gallantry they had always done) to hamper him in his professional career. There was a long period of half-pay, and what happened exactly at this time nobody in the small circle of the Souls' acquaintance knew. The family occupied a semi-detached house—one of a row—at Southsea ; and the people who lived on the other side of the partition were disturbed by what seemed to be a

continual ripple of feminine recrimination, broken now and again by masculine oaths forcibly delivered. This never stopped ; it began with the coming of the milkman and continued into the small hours of the following morning. It continued for weeks and months, even for years—until one day Lieutenant Henry Jason Arthur Souls actually got a ship, the gunboat *Arethusa*, then stationed off the west coast of Africa. Here he had the luck to take part in an expedition against a slave-trading town in the Oil Rivers, and the bad luck to be hit with slugs while attacking a stockade. Fever, for which his habits of life rendered him a bad subject, supervened, and Emma Souls was left a widow. She received the usual frugal pension from the Crown ; and, giving up the Southsea house, took a cottage at King's Stratton, where she lived in ill-tempered obscurity with her two small daughters, Miriam and Kate, who were rapidly growing beyond her control.

It was dull work scolding the lady-help, punishing the children, and puzzling out patterns of jerseys (then the last word of fashion) from the pages of some magazine. She hinted of a nobleman who had once admired her, of ropes of pearls, and dinners off gold plate. She held this mystery about her always. Her very appearance hinted at disreputable secrets, and yet nothing was known to her hurt. It was almost as though Emma Souls preferred the imputation of a lurid past to the dead respectability which she abhorred, and in which certainly she lived.

'A titled gentleman, oh my !' the lady-help

had exclaimed under her breath, having heard the story for the first time, and Mrs. Henry Jason Arthur Souls had never contradicted her.

Now, bearing the glamour of this dreaming Past full on her, she tramped the dusty road between King's Stratton and Weybourne Park.

How it exactly came about she never knew, but at the request of the vicar, Mr. Cyril Money, she had made, under protest, some shirts for a ladies' needlework guild (or rather, the lady-help had made them), and one day—oh, wonder, and deep bliss!—Sir James and Lady Brereton's cards lay upon the hall table, for Lady Brereton was the president of the Guild.

Emma Souls had tried to pass the matter over lightly.

'Dear me, Lady Brereton has called!' she exclaimed; 'well, I should think that it was about time, since I have been at King's Stratton now for over four years!' At the same time she smiled a subtle inward smile impossible to repress, and when Miriam, her eldest daughter, stuck the cards into the mirror, she affected not to notice them.

She was on her way now to return this call. In her great discomfort from the dust and heat—for her tight thin shoes had become almost unendurable—the sight of the park gates brought her some relief, but she had still another half-mile of difficult ground to cover. She rebelled, but kicking against the pricks, in every sense of the phrase, only added to her misery. Why should she be compelled to walk in the dust, she wondered, while others drove?

The Park stretched flatly to right and left; great elms, full-leaved oaks, chestnuts, tight and round like tea-cosies in the distance, made blue shadows on the grass that looked almost grey in the blinding yellow of the sun. In these shadows Mrs. Souls made out the distant, delicate forms of deer. She espied them with some satisfaction, for deer were aristocratic animals, and it was quite fitting that they should surround a house at which she was going to return a call. She had never been inside the park gates before, but—Good gracious, how hot it was! She pulled out a powder puff, concealed in a pocket handkerchief, and dabbed at her face; there was a small looking-glass at the back of the thing, and in it she saw herself blotched and mottled with the heat. It was unpleasant, for she would have liked to look her best—but there, to be hot was only human on a day like this, and Lady Brereton herself probably looked hot too! So Emma took comfort, and turning at last into the flower-garden, approached the massive pile of the house. She looked up at the heraldic achievement on the wrought-iron gateway, and thrilled.

Before ringing, she opened her handbag and produced a card. She determined to leave it in the hall before going into the drawing-room; for Lady Brereton, she thought, would be sure to accompany her to the hall door, and it would be most awkward then to be obliged to fumble over her card-case. She held it ready, and, palpitating, rang the bell.

'Not at home.'

The tall footman had dealt her a blow. She presented her card, and turned back to face another two-mile walk in the baking dust. It was only what might have been expected, but Mrs. Souls was entirely miserable: her shoes pinched her intolerably, her mantle cramped her arms, her waistband was too tight, and her plait lay heavy on her damp forehead. Only with difficulty did she prevent herself from bursting into tears. She imagined that the footman looked at her curiously; and anger against his imaginary insolence rose up in her heart. She turned back and spoke angrily.

'Are you quite sure that Lady Brereton is out? You have never been to see. I heard voices in the garden as I came up the path.'

The man stared at her. 'Her ladyship is—not at home.' The door shut emphatically.

For the second time Emma turned away. She walked slowly down the garden path, thinking. Lady Brereton would never call upon her again; she was sure of that. All was over. Her hopes were dashed for ever. She had imagined herself dining at Weybourne Park in a dress with elbow sleeves and cut in a V at the neck. That dream was broken. The man's insolent calm made her cheeks tingle. 'Not at home,' indeed! She was positive that Lady Brereton was somewhere near—sitting in the garden possibly.

She walked along, looking neither to the right nor left, her gaze turned inwards, until the sudden sound of wheels made her lift her eyelids. Mr. Cyril Money's dogcart rattled up the drive.

With a bow and a smile, the Rector whirled past the disconsolate Emma, who was obliged to stand on one side as he went by. She wondered if he would be turned back also. She would give a good deal to know what would happen. She stopped, and then, moved by a quick impulse, retraced her steps, until, concealed by the shadow of a great ilex, she was near enough to see the door. To her astonishment the Rector was shaking hands with the footman, whose face was now a mere pleasant grin. The supercilious expression had vanished.

'Well, James, how are you? Better, I hope! Her ladyship at home? Eh? That's all right. Now, when are all you men coming down to play my lads?—mum, mum, mum.' The rest of his voice was lost as the door closed behind him.

Mrs. Souls crept out from her hiding-place.

'Well,' she said to herself, bitterly. '*Well!*'

Words failed her, choked by indignation. She walked a few steps, and then she stopped again. On consideration she felt sure that it was the footman who had baulked her. Why did he not go and see where Lady Brereton was, and take her card? 'Not at home,' indeed! She was sure now that he had said it of his own responsibility. The thing was a plot. She would catch Lady Brereton after church next Sunday, tell her what had happened, and get the man dismissed. Such conduct was intolerable! Lady Brereton would not permit it—she was sure of that. She lived every moment of the horrible episode over again. The footman had said 'her ladyship'; ought she

to have said 'her ladyship' too, or plain 'Lady Brereton'? 'Is her ladyship in?' 'Is Lady Brereton at home?' 'Is Lady Brereton disengaged?' 'Is her ladyship receiving to-day?' Which was right? Which was 'the thing'? Perhaps she had made some terrible mistake and the man had deluded her. Perhaps that was why he had said 'Not at home!' Torturing herself with these reflections, Emma painfully retraced the two homeward miles.

She found Miss Webber, the lady-help, anxiously awaiting her arrival. Miss Webber was a rosy-cheeked young woman full of discharging high spirits.

'Well,' she cried, as she ran to the door, to open it for Mrs. Souls, 'and what is Lady Brereton like? Is she very fast? Did they do anything extraordinary, throw cake or anything at each other? I hear that is the smart thing nowadays at tea. Do tell me all about it. I'm simply dying to know! Why, Mrs. Souls,'—she stopped short and a look of concern crossed her face—'you *do* look tired!'

'Tired!' snapped Emma, 'I'm dead! I've had a five-mile walk, counting that bit of the park, in these beastly shoes. My head's hammering fit to burst, and as for the aristocracy—well, I never want to have anything more to do with them as long as I live.'

'Oh,' cried Miss Webber, brightening, 'then they *did* do strange things! I am reading a book from the library that says that that sort of life is perfectly awful. What——'

But Mrs. Souls cut her short. 'Don't talk such nonsense! Lady Brereton—her ladyship, I mean, was not at home, and—oh, gracious, why do you fry onions on such a broiling day? The smell is enough to make a cat sick!'

'I was making that mutton into a bit of curry for your supper,' said Miss Webber, sulkily. '*Some one* has got to fry the onions.'

Mrs. Souls pushed off her shoes and threw them into the middle of the room; she then loosened her belt and collar, and, picking up a ladies' paper, lay down upon the couch to rest. In the meanwhile Miss Webber, with some display of temper, had departed.

'Just make me a cup of tea, there's a good creature,' shouted Mrs. Souls; 'and give an eye to the girls when they come in.' But Miss Webber affected not to hear.

Emma lay back on her couch and one or two tears trickled down her cheeks. Even Alice Webber had turned against her now. She was unutterably weary and sick at heart; every nerve in her body was aching. She wished now that she was quit of the whole wretched business of the Breretons. 'Society, indeed! What do I want with society? I only want a quiet life!'

In saying this Emma Souls deceived herself.

Her peace was short-lived, for in another two minutes her children, returned from their usual afternoon ramble, burst in upon her. Miss Webber had not given 'an eye.' Why should she? She was still nursing her wounded dignity, and preferred to sit alone in the kitchen with

the curry. 'Let those that owns thems have the bother of them!' she said, snappishly.

So, pushing and struggling in their eagerness to be the first to speak, Kate and Miriam descended upon their prostrate mother. A chance name, however, roused Mrs. Souls. She opened one eye and removed her pocket handkerchief from her forehead; it was the same name that had laid her low—'Lady Brereton.'

'We've been to tea with Lady Brereton,' cried the little girls, excitedly. 'There, what do you think of that?'

Emma sat up now and wiped her face. 'Been to tea with Lady Brereton!' she exclaimed, incredulously.

Her youngest daughter, grimy, but flushed with happiness, clutched a basket of peaches. 'There!' she said, tumbling them into her mother's hands, 'there's proof! Oh, Mumsy, such times!'

The child was like a peach herself, warm and dusky, with brown hair and eyes. It did not occur to Emma at that moment to admire her progeny, admirable though it was, the other girl blacker but in another way as handsome. Emma was entirely absorbed; she fingered as it were her astonishment with the peaches. 'How——' she began, but explanations were delayed. Each sister was resolute in her intention of speaking first.

'You know old Johnson?'

'You know Johnson's Mill?'

'You know Gervase Alleyne?'

Mrs. Souls nodded; she knew the tall quiet boy with the short-sighted eyes quite well. 'Go on!'

'Well, Gervase Alleyne was fishing with a girl called Marion Brereton, only we didn't know then what she was called. We didn't——'

'How stupidly you tell it,' interpolated Kate; 'why don't you begin at the beginning. Oh, Mumsy,' her excitement choked her, 'Gervase Alleyne fished a duck!' The child clapped her hands, and danced round in a sudden ecstacy of glee.

'What do you mean by fishing a duck?' asked Mrs. Souls, crossly. Her daughter's method of telling a story was extremely irritating to the patience of the weary and yet curious lady lying on the sofa.

Gervase Alleyne, it appeared, had fished a duck—a duck had swallowed his bait. The small girls on the opposite bank had fetched the miller, who in some miraculous way extracted the hook. Thus an introduction was effected between Gervase Alleyne, and Miriam, and Kate Souls. But Emma was still far enough away from Lady Brereton and the tea-party.

'Let me go on. It's my story.'

'No, it's mine! I'm the eldest!

'Crosspatch!'

'Mother, Kate is being rude to me—she is kicking my ankles, too. Please send her out of the room.'

'Tell-tale-tit, Tongue shall be slit, All——'

'Oh!' Mrs. Souls put her fingers in her ears. 'Stop that jabbering! You go on, Miriam.'

But Miriam was firm and sulky. 'Not unless you send Kate out of the room.'

Mrs. Souls turned to Kate with an appeal in her voice. 'Kate, go out of the room. It is all your fault. It always is.'

Kate, rebellious, sat down upon an arm-chair and refused to move. She was, eventually, after much talk, carried out kicking and screaming by Miss Webber, whose presence was reminiscent of curry.

Mrs. Souls indulged in a flood of tears.

'Do you want to hear the rest?' asked Miriam, sulkily, when her mother had finally wiped her eyes.

But by this time, from long denial, Mrs. Souls' curiosity had dwindled. She really did not care now whether she heard the story or not. 'I don't know, just as you like! You are every bit as bad as Kate, with your sulky ways, although she always gets the blame. I don't know that I don't like a quick temper best myself.' Miriam did not reply, but sat stolidly looking in front of her. 'Oh, well, go on,' said Mrs. Souls, breaking the silence.

'After Gervase had fished the duck'—Miriam spoke as though nothing untoward had occurred, notwithstanding the fact that Kate was noisily battering at the door on the other side.

'Well, what?'

'We played with him. That's all. Then we walked with him and Marion on and on and on—to Weybourne. At last Marion asked us to tea—that is, if her mother did not mind. Her mother didn't at all. Marion asked her in front of us, and she only laughed. She said we had such anxious faces. We had tea in the garden. Mr.

Money was there, but nobody else, for Lady Brereton wanted to be quiet because of her nephew. He had just come. He has something wrong with his heart, and has to lie on his back. He didn't mind us. He showed us a new game of Patience. It was very joyful. We ate peaches and cream. Peaches have very rough skins. Did you know? Lady Brereton was quite surprised because Kate and I had not tasted one before. She gave us all these to bring back.'

'You shouldn't have let on that you hadn't tasted a peach before,' said Mrs. Souls, irritably. 'Do you want Lady Brereton to think you a pauper? Fancy giving away the show like that! You should have eaten what was put before you without talking about it.'

'Catch me—or Kate either!' returned Miriam, scornfully; 'if we had, we should have missed all these to bring back. Lady Brereton was very kind. She seemed to pity us. She asked us lots of questions and patted Kate's hair. I think she thought that Kate looked pretty. People do. When we were playing, that ugly boy, Gervase Alleyne, said, "Let Kate be the Princess, because she is so pretty."'

Emma had not been attending to the last part of Miriam's history. Now she interrupted it. 'What had Lady Brereton got on?'

'I don't know,' returned Miriam, carelessly, 'something white; she looked very cool; she is not grand at all—not nearly as grand as you are on Sundays. I liked her, though, she had such a kind face. I say, hadn't I better open the

door? If Kate kicks at it like that she'll spoil the paint.'

'Oh yes, let her in,' returned Emma, wearily; 'and then you can both go to Miss Webber.'

Meanwhile, Lady Brereton, unconscious of poor Emma's tribulation, still sat in the cool garden at Weybourne, talking with her husband and one friend, Mrs. Richard Savile, who had dropped in for a short visit before dinner. The sun had withdrawn his dangerous rays and was preparing to fold them peacefully away in a quiet sunset. Lady Brereton knitted placidly while Sir James, known to his friends as 'Jim' and to his wife as 'Kitten,' darted about the lawn with a glass tube of vitriol, a few drops of which, he declared, applied to the roots of unwelcome dandelions and plantains, exterminated them for ever. This invention gave him a good deal of pleasure, and his wife knew well that before its results could be tested he would have forgotten all about it. James Brereton was a small, wiry, red-haired, freckled, fidgety man with an impulsive manner, and a smile that was flashed straight from his heart. It was the smile, more than anything else, perhaps, that held old friends close and won him new ones. His wife found it, and him, adorable. Millicent Savile always laughed affectionately at both the Breretons. 'Kitten, indeed!' she had been heard to say. 'Anything more like a kitten couldn't exist—unless it were a thin red Manx cat, always looking for its own tail!'

She laughed at them at this moment, lying back luxuriously in her chair.

'You declared that you wanted to be alone to-day, to think,' she said suddenly.

'So I did,' replied Lady Brereton, cutting off the end of a thread of silk.

'Extraordinary creatures—women!' Kitten pulled himself up laboriously from his knees. 'There has been a children's party here all the afternoon! Fancy, thinking during a children's party!' Catching sight of the yellow head of a dandelion he darted towards it. 'Scotched! Base and perfidious plant!'

'Did you really have a party, Emily?'

'No, of course not. Gervase Alleyne came up to play with Marion, that was all; they had some adventures at the Mill and made friends with the two little Souls, whom they brought back to tea.'

'Souls! Souls! Who are the Souls?'

'I can't tell you. Nobody knows. The mother is a widow—not a very pleasant person, I imagine. I called upon her because Mr. Money asked me to, and she has joined my Guild. The children, poor little things, are sweet. I felt sorry for them; they have no friends, and seem to be rather neglected.'

'And what about that other pitiable infant, Gervase Alleyne? How is he getting on?'

Lady Brereton laid down her knitting.

'My dear Millicent, there you have touched upon a tragedy. The child is absolutely alone in that great empty house. He has no companion, but is left entirely to the care of a governess and servants. He will grow up either an idiot or a genius.'

'What has the Flutterer done for him?'

'Mrs. Willoughby Fairfax! Nothing—absolutely nothing. She never comes near the place. When she is not in London she is abroad or in Scotland. She has engaged a sour hard woman, a Miss Florence Kirkwood, to look after the child until he goes to school. Poor Mary Alleyne! If the dead know what is going on down here, her heaven will be a pretty scorching purgatory, I imagine! How she adored that boy!'

'Who are you talking about, Pippin?' said Sir James, dancing up to his wife and sitting down on a cushion at her feet.

'Mary Alleyne.'

'Bless her heart!' said the little man fervently. 'I always want to take off my hat, or cross myself, or turn round three times, or do something, when people talk of Mary Alleyne. She was too good for this terraqueous globe. I wonder what that boy of hers will turn out! He ought to go to school.'

'He is to work with Mr. Money before he goes to Eton. Mary left elaborate directions for his upbringing. She had a horror of the preparatory school. Poor child! When I think of my Marion and all the care and love that have been showered upon her, my heart aches for that desolate boy. I should like to kidnap him and bring him up myself.'

'A nice look-out,' said Kitten, feverishly lighting a cigarette for want of something better to do. 'You'd have the two wanting to marry each other

—propinquity, eh?—two young people bound to get engaged—can't help it—nature. Rum thing, isn't it, that all the housemaids and footmen don't fall in love with each other!'

'Perhaps they do,' said Mrs. Savile, getting up and shaking her skirts out preparatory to taking her departure. 'I suspect that there is many a broken heart in the servants' hall that nobody knows about. Our novelists are not drawn from that section of society. No one hears of a Housemaid's Love Letters, or the Broken Heart of an Under Footman. Good-bye, dear Pippin. I hate children as a rule. I am frightened of them: they are so horribly direct. But I think I shall ask Master Gervase to lunch with me one day and release him from the Dragon-in-charge for a few hours.'

'That would be a blessed thing to do,' said Lady Brereton as she kissed her friend good-bye. 'It is like you to think of it.'

Later in the evening her thoughts returned to the child at King's Stratton. It was now nearly four years since Lady Mary's death. What had those four years brought to the desolate boy, left to strangers and servants? 'Could I have done more?' thought Lady Brereton. Her conscience suddenly awoke, and tormented her. 'How will he grow up? What will he become?'' She pondered on the fact that he was his mother's son, and that if there was anything at all in heredity that would be a safeguard. Her husband's prophecy concerning Gervase and her own daughter made her smile. From a worldly point of view

Marion might do worse, but how absurd—how intensely absurd!

Then her thoughts flew back to her visitors of the afternoon, the children of Emma Souls. They were lonely too in a different way. Again her conscience reproached her. She would do more for these three lonely children, of that she was determined. She marked her resolution with a final click of the knitting-needles: then she rolled up her stocking and put it away; it was bedtime.

CHAPTER V

IN WHICH THE HERO DISPLAYS THE QUALITIES OF HIS DEFECTS

KING'S STRATTON, *June* 14, 1890.—To-day is my birthday. I am just eleven, and Miss Kirkwood has given me a diary. I don't know how she came to think of such a useful thing. I wish though that there was some way of keeping a diary without writing it. I have a great flow of thought, but it dries up when I begin to spell. This diary is to be the register of my life. I am anxious to have a heroic life, and to leave behind me a footprint on the sand of time. I shall if I try hard enough; but I shall have to bear a good deal. I do bear a good deal as it is. Sometimes I would like to boil Miss Kirkwood or flay her; she is so aggravating. She has a hard face, very red and dry like a brick wall. I hate her face. I hate a great many people. There is nobody here to love, except Marion, and then Marion is only a girl, and one can't love a girl. I hunger much for a friend whom I could love with a love passing the love of women. As I have no friend I imagine one. His name is Percival. He is good at games. I hate games. I cannot see the ball and am slow. But he is good at them. He is good all round. I would rather write poetry than be good at cricket. I have just finished a poem; it is called 'On the Consolations of Religion.' I find religion a great consolation. I don't know what I should do without it. I pour out my thoughts in prayer, and at night when I wake up I

like to think of God always with me. I love God with all my heart and soul and mind and strength. I don't think the words of the Catechism are too strong. Marion does. She says that nobody could love God like that. She thinks that they are absurd. She does not love God at all really. But then Marion has so many things to love. She has two Peruvian guinea-pigs among others. We made the acquaintance of some girls to-day. I had seen them before in church, but did not know their names. One is very pretty, her name is Kate. If she had been a boy, and older, she might have been Percival. That thought is a grief to me. I am glad I know them. I do not think that they thought that I was ugly or short-sighted. I have many griefs; short-sightedness is one of them. I can never be a soldier, or a sailor—not that I want to be. There must be other ways of being heroic. I should like to explore, or I should like to find a cure for cancer. Mother died of cancer. It is a horrible and a foul disease. The man would be a hero and leave a footprint who discovered it.

I am looking forward greatly to going to school. I long for the society of boys. I long, too, for school life. Being bad at games is against it, but I should be sure to find a boy to chum with, perhaps even Percival might be there. I should love the world of school I know. I have read *Eric, or Little by Little*, *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, and many books. In some schools the bullying is bad. I should never bully. Perhaps I shall leave a footprint at Eton. I cannot write more. Miss Kirkwood has come to tell me it is bedtime. Besides, the writing has gone off. I will continue better to-morrow. To-night is my first night of being eleven. When I am twelve I am to read with Mr. Money, and when I am fourteen I shall go to School. Hurrah.

Having 'a great flow of thought,' as descriptive of the state of the boy's mind at this time, is not entirely accurate; thought as such was still un-

developed. He lived in a dim world of his own, peopled by the Percivals and other beings of his imagination, and in this, as in almost everything, he was entirely unlike the ordinary English boy of his age. Self-consciousness was unknown to him: he felt no shyness in speaking of sacred subjects, for he feared no ridicule: 'prig' was a word he did not realise, although it was one which, from a certain point of view, might easily have been applied to him. He was simple, honest, courageous, obedient and affectionate. Certain edges of his character had become unduly sharpened by contact with a hard nature such as that of Florence Kirkwood, and certain needs had become emphasised from sheer starvation. Knowing little of the love of father or mother, brother or sister, —which ordinary boyhood accepts as naturally as the air it breathes—only holding tenaciously to the remembrance of a warm and wonderful past, the boy's emotional nature grew, but grew in iron bands. One day the bands would part, burst asunder by a force impossible to estimate unless considered in the light of this early imprisonment. How many inexplicable contrasts of human character would become clear to us, could we discern in them the influences at work during this period of boyhood! An inherited leaning towards asceticism bound him still more. He enjoyed the difficulty of a self-imposed task, and worked at his games until he literally could work no more. 'Will finish making my kite by tea-time to-morrow or will commit suicide,' is a note in his diary, enclosed by the red ink line by which he intended to signify a vow.

His prayers at this time were long and detailed, and he never forgot to say them. He made his own rule of life, and lived up to it as far as he was able, never during the whole of her stay asking advice of Miss Kirkwood. Sometimes he found himself in difficulties. Good and evil occasionally presented changed aspects to his inexperience, and there was no one to direct him.

A trouble of this sort had fallen upon him some two years back, and the perplexity even now remained. He was nine when the thing happened. Miss Kirkwood lost a sovereign. She had left her purse in a bag in the schoolroom, and a young girl, an under-housemaid, was accused of the theft. The girl endeavoured to throw the blame on the child who had been playing in the room, and Gervase was almost questioned into confessing a theft which he had never committed. However, the courage of the fearful, which is the only admirable courage, supported him, and, trembling with terror, he denied it. When he undressed that night the sovereign rolled from the pocket of his blouse to his feet. He looked at it stupefied: it proved him a liar. What was to be done? To tell the truth would be futile, for Miss Kirkwood, at the best of times, was inclined to doubt his word, and now the sovereign spoke against him. He moved his bare toes up and down over the coin until a sound outside the door arrested him. Then he stood up straight, holding the money with his foot.

'Be quick and get into bed, Gervase,' said

Miss Kirkwood, looking into the room. 'What are you doing?'

'Mooning,' returned the boy imperturbably; 'at least I'm doing what you call mooning.'

'If you are not in bed in five minutes you will be punished. Don't be impertinent.'

The door shut with a bang. What was to be done? Gervase slept that night with the sovereign rolled up in a corner of his night-shirt. His mind was quite clear that he had not stolen it, but the sooner he parted from it, he felt, the better. Next morning he took it out to the wood-walk and buried it at the foot of an ash tree.

In considering this matter afterwards he never looked upon himself as the thief, nor did it occur to him that it was his duty to hand over the money to Miss Kirkwood. That, from his point of view, would be to court disaster. The sovereign had given a great deal of trouble and was better buried; he was sure of that. He did not even wonder disproportionately how it had come to be in his blouse. It had got there: he looked upon it as one might look upon the act of God—inevitable. The only person who continued to question him was the housemaid. Had he found anything in his pocket? she asked him. Oh no, he shook his head. (He had not, the coin had lain at his feet.) The girl stared, and then stood pensive: a quick observer could have seen regret in her eyes. Perhaps she was thinking that her sudden fear had been unwarranted, and that she might have kept it after all. Gervase saw nothing: he was so very glad that the sovereign was buried safely and out of the

way. Years after, when Miss Kirkwood was leaving King's Stratton, he tried to dig it up to restore it to her, but found that he had forgotten the exact place where he had put it.

Until he reached the age of eleven he was, but for Marion Brereton, almost entirely destitute of playmates; however, his adventure with the duck brought him Kate and Miriam Souls. The children met often, plotted, played, and, being three, quarrelled naturally, thus bringing Gervase into a more normal state of childhood. Both the Souls were fond of him, but in her heart Miriam despised him as girlish. Kate was his ally and dear comrade. He confided to her his regret as to her sex, which she—although from pride she affected to make light of it — most cordially shared. Kate detested long hair and frocks and all the appurtenances of girlhood. She longed for a tweed suit such as Gervase wore, and a flannel shirt. Marion Brereton always heard her diatribes on the subject in some amazement; but then Marion was clothed sensibly, and knew little of ill-fitting shoes and tight waistbands. Gervase went up to Weybourne to play with Marion on Saturday afternoons, and on Sunday he generally went to a new friend, Mrs. Richard Savile. There was no boy of his own age in the neighbourhood but Peter Brereton. Percival was never materialised, and Peter, although he was amused by Gervase privately, would not have liked to have acknowledged the acquaintance to his friends. 'He is so——' 'What?' asked Lady Brereton, 'childish?' 'No, that is not it!' said Peter. 'He is childish,

but that's not the word, there is no word for him ; he's not exactly soft, or sawny, but he's queer.'

The next year Gervase went to work with Mr. Money. The shadow of school was upon him and his life grew suddenly more important. The Rector found him easy to teach, but, as Peter Brereton had said, 'queer.'

'Why do you stay in this little place?' Gervase said one day to the Reverend Cyril while he was helping to plant out lupins in the Rectory garden ; 'I read somewhere that missionaries are wanted awfully in New Guinea. If you went out there, you might stand a chance of being a martyr!' The smile with which the Rector greeted the words was changed to a quick bewilderment, as he looked up from his work at the boy's face. It was grave ; to him the thing was a conceivable ambition.

The night before he went to Eton, Gervase wrote in his diary :

May 16, 1893. — I am going to school to-morrow. It is a great step. I have prayed much for strength, and I feel God is very near me. Last night I lay quietly in bed thinking, and I felt His presence fill my soul. I thought that I was going to see a vision, but nothing came. This morning everything altered. God has gone away from me, and with all my prayers I cannot reach Him. I feel very lonely. I have prayed to my mother to ask help for me. I don't know if this is right, and permitted by our Church. I do not feel that my prayer is heard. Why am I left in this doubt? I am not conscious of having sinned. I am only anxious to do right, and yet I feel as if something horrible is waiting for me. It is so strange, for I am only going for the first time to live with boys who are like myself.

Miss Kirkwood has gone. I shall never see her again.

She cried when she went, and before I knew what I was doing I had kissed her. But I was not sorry to part with her: I did not really care. I knew in my heart that I should not really care if she died. I don't think that I can care for anybody very much: that is why I can give my heart to God. The saints felt much the same. Mr. Money has given me a cricket bat, and Lady Brereton a ripping kite with five hundred yards of string. I like the kite best, but I shall leave it at home. I have finished three books of the *Aeneid* with Mr. Money, and he says I am getting on well. To-morrow!

Of the months that followed this entry little record shall be given. In looking back, Gervase saw them as a long nightmare, an extended unutterable anguish. It is impossible for us to realise except by analogy even a small part of what this strange, highly strung, introspective child endured during his first weeks at Eton. Imagine a man of this temper, highly civilised, able to reason and to feel acutely, plunged back suddenly into a hostile world which has arrived at, let us say, the period of the Stone Age, and with which he is wildly desirous to ingratiate himself—imagine this, and, apart from his distinctive qualities, you have some shadowy idea of the position of Gervase at school. Presumably his contemporaries at Eton were each something remotely like himself and made of some sort of intellectual and feeling stuff, but Gervase as a new boy, and a scug (for he was short-sighted and not good at games), had nothing to do with them; individually and collectively they had (the analogy holds good) arrived at the civilisation of the Stone Age. But indeed in each human creature the history of the world is repeated in miniature,

and boy is only primitive man stirred by the ambitions and emotions of the savage. There is a period in his life that corresponds to the Stone Age. Gervase Alleyne had, owing to his peculiar circumstances, skipped this stage. Undeveloped as yet, with the voice and mien of a young child, he had, however, from stern criticism of himself and his own conduct—a criticism that had become possible in his loneliness—the perception and introspection of a grown man. He was quick to criticise others, but he judged the world on larger issues than could be comprehended by the people who now sat in judgment upon him. Yet his progress had been attended with loss to himself, for the character hardens during the Stone Age, and Gervase turned but a soft shell to an unfriendly world. Undue originality is checked during this period, imagination forbidden, and the fine feelings held in abeyance. When school days are over and these things are once more permitted to appear (any, that is, that may still survive), they are tempered by that worldly wisdom which grows from the experience of the average man ; they are disciplined, firmer, stronger, and better able to endure. But the average man, looking back from the heights of his experience to the Stone Age, sees it in the sunset glow of memory :—it was such a jolly time, so fresh, so sane, so stirring ; it was good to rub up against one's fellows and prove one's mettle, to feel oneself strong and popular and able to smack the silly heads of small boys. Heroes were real heroes in those days, and the Universe mere playing fields. He looks back upon it all and sentimentalises.

But the new boy, the shivering wretched scug, the alien whom everybody is against and who is forbidden by the doctor to play cricket even if he wanted to, does not sentimentalise ; he sees it all from another point of view. He does not appreciate the upright, well-grown, well-mannered boy with the honest face and brave eyes, in middle division, any more than a mouse might appreciate the points of a most lovable cat. He is in the fourth form and unpopular, and, poor wretch, he looks at life from a different point of view. It is only on the heights that one can feel robust.

So Gervase among some eight or nine hundred animals of a strange species found himself as morbid as the harried mouse. For the first few days he was dazed, he longed only to get out of the way of his tormentors. 'Hullo, new fellow, who are you ? What's your name ? Who's your father ? Where have you taken ?' He shut his ears to the words until a punch or two produced an answer. Then he hung about odd corners and passages, and, when he could, escaped into the open. He was nervous also over his work, but his principal desire at this time was to get away from his comrades. Night brought him some relief, for he was able to cry into his pillow ; then the salt rose in his throat unchecked, and he prayed as he had never prayed before, not for happiness in life —he was far beyond that—but for a merciful and speedy death. He interpreted every careless glance of his companions as conveying hatred and contempt. He met them in silence, but there was in his attitude a certain querulous meekness that

enraged the cheerfully robust. The boys of his own form found him too clever, also they suspected him of criticism, but the crowning disgrace in their eyes was that he wept easily. At the end of the first week his nerve had gone, and a casual kick was enough to make him whimper. Then, after much ridicule (and the small boy of the Stone Age uses his tongue to some purpose), with occasional arm-twisting and head-smacking to maintain the traditions of the place and the race, they left him alone. He went about his work white and sullen, with ineradicable hatred in his heart.

He never dared to think of King's Stratton now except at nights, because he was rapidly growing hysterical, and the picture of the ash tree under which Miss Kirkwood's sovereign lay buried was enough to bring tears. How intensely he loved it all! Every stick and stone and blade of grass in the place was full of memories. He had only to shut his eyes, and the clanging of the rookery sounded in his ears: there was the walk where he had picked up tiny stones when he was a baby, the yard where he had seen a rat; these things could be conjured before him, for they were loved with a morbid passion, impossible for those more happily circumstanced to comprehend. And yet there was in it an intense human instinct. 'If I cannot love a man I must love a tree,' said Maurice de Guérin; so Gervase thought of the great ash and its many expressions of flickering light and shadow with the emotions of a lover. He loved his tree for the 'ends of being and ideal grace'; and not only his tree, but the blurred

view from the sloping bank of the wood-walk, out across the river; the dim purple of the hills beyond, the tiny flowers hidden in the moss at his feet; the smell of the growing ferns; the liquid notes of birds in the boughs above; they were all his, his share of the world—that and God and the memory of his mother. His heart, weary with its endless weeping, rested here on shadows.

'It's a good thing that boy has gone to school,' said the Reverend Cyril one day to Lady Brereton; 'it will make a man of him.'

'I should just think so!' interpolated Peter Brereton from his couch; 'he wants some of the nonsense knocked out of him. He's so queer. By Jove, what luck some chaps have! Here am I with a beastly heart, tied by the leg, when——'

'Poor children—both,' said Lady Brereton, laying a hand on the boy's forehead. But Peter wondered why she had included Gervase.

So the miserable hours at Eton worked themselves away, and at night Gervase prayed alternately to his God and his mother, and wept into his pillow.

He was very thin at this time, mere skin and bone, and his head ached continually. Also he had lost his grip on the school work: his master grew impatient, and began to think that his first estimate of the boy's intellect had been mistaken.

Then things reached a crisis. It seemed as though his life had ebbed; he could do no work, and fainted that afternoon in school. Next day his skin burnt; he had a rash on his chest, and reported himself to the Matron.

'Scarlet fever.' The rush of joy with which

Gervase heard the doctor's verdict almost blinded him. God had answered his prayer : there would be respite now from that daily routine of anguish. He stretched out his aching limbs into the cool sheets with wonderful happiness ; he was free now of his fellows, as he might have been free of a cloud of biting, stinging, deadly flies. But there was another battle to be fought, and that an involuntary one. Had he realised it, he would have thought the battle for life a small thing compared to the enforced battle of school, which was never lost or won, but which continued always. He had, however, no time to think. The attack was a sharp one: it came with a whirl and a rush, and physically broken as he was, he could hardly combat it. For some days he lay hovering on a dim borderland, death's prisoner, but not his prey.

At this time his mind was left to itself, while his body fought bravely, and it wandered back over the scene, not only of the last few days, but of his early childhood. He talked of these things indiscriminately. In his right mind, how he would have blushed to hear the words!

'Let me alone, you chaps! Don't go playing the ass! Lower boy! No, I'm not going—another beastly swizzle. Let me alone, I say—my God!' Then it seemed that the scene had shifted. 'Kate, come with me and defend the fort against Miriam and Marion ; or would you rather play bobbies and thieves? Marion can't stop, Lady Brereton says so! Oh, well, I suppose she must go, Lady Brereton is always so jolly decent. "All ye green things upon the earth, praise ye the

Lord." How ripping dew is hanging on gossamer! —what *is* gossamer? "O God, hear my prayer, and let my cry come unto Thee." I hate Miss Kirkwood. Why mayn't I lift up the edge of the blind? It's quite light—the sun is streaming in. Why must blinds be pulled down in the day-time? Nurse, nurse! I looked! The yard is full of carriages with great black feathers! What great person drives in carriages covered in black feathers? No! no traffic to-day; the trains are resting. Mother is so very very tired. Ah—' then a long low wail brought the trained nurse anxiously to the bedside—'let go, you brutes, that's playing it pretty low! I didn't say it hurt, did I? Brutes, devils, I don't care if I do blub! What's that to you? O God!—God!—God!'

Another boy was ill with Gervase, and some ten days later a third arrived at the sanatorium. Gervase was the most seriously ill of the three, but Jack Denham followed him pretty closely, and in the later stages of convalescence Gervase discovered, almost against his will, that this new boy was not in reality very different from himself. There was time to talk here, and the wall of reserve that surrounds the schoolboy more effectually than any other created being became, during the long hours of intercourse, somewhat filmy. The boys discovered each others' minds, confessed a mutual attachment to photography and white mice, and finally arranged to see each other in the holidays. Thus a friendship sprang up between the two, to be broken only by events that took place many years afterwards, changing the current of Gervase's

life. Destiny, setting the stage, never hints of the future. One day, without any warning, a stranger who is to control the stars of our particular firmament, drifts across our way. He looks like everybody else, and we are not much interested; only when it is too late do we discover suddenly why he was timed to arrive at that particular moment, and how it was that the ultimate catastrophe was plotted.

Jack Denham was a year older than Gervase, a curly haired, blue-eyed boy of irrepressible temperament, good at games and easily popular; but a year at that time of life means a good deal, and between the fourth form and middle division there is fixed a great and usually impassable gulf. Further, the difference between the two was accentuated by the fact that Jack's voice had taken on a youthful bass, while Gervase still piped in a shrill treble, and a treble that was now plaintive from weakness. Had Gervase known it, he was greatly honoured by Denham's friendship, and a promise of some photographic films to be given as soon as they were out of quarantine should have rehabilitated him for ever in the consideration of the lower boys. But all things come too late, and Gervase, having had the bitter (full measure and pressed down), was never destined to taste the sweet of school-life. His illness had left him a wreck, and slightly deaf; when it was all over; and after the others had gone off to the country or the seaside, Gervase still remained at school. Day by day the doctor examined him, and once he returned with the housemaster, and both men plied the boy with

questions, to which he answered perfunctorily and with little interest. He was very tired and only needed, in his own opinion, to be let alone.

'Rum little chap!' said the master, as the door closed behind them, 'I can't make him out. Curiously impassive, isn't he? Doesn't care one straw about life!'

'That's a bad state to be in at his age,' replied the doctor grimly. 'The boy is too thin, that's what's the matter with him. He must go home and lie about in the sun and stuff himself out with food. He must give up milk and drink cream in buckets. That boy wants an awful lot of petting —as much as he will swallow—he wants petting more even than food. An orphan, is he? poor chap! Well, write to his guardian, whoever he is, and tell him to buck up and do his duty, or the lad will die. He's too thin, I say. A lot too thin. His weight is absurd. There is no tubercular trouble yet, but, he has every chance of developing any blessed germ that gets a hold on him.'

'Lie about in the sun! Stuff himself out with food! Drink cream in buckets!' That part of the prescription was repeated to Jack Denham and left him breathless. 'Cream in buckets, good Lord!' He repeated the sentence in awestruck tones. 'What a prescription! My hat, what a prescription! He has got to go home and got to be cossetted, oh lucky, lucky brute!'

The rest of this recipe for health was sent out in a letter to Mrs. Willoughby Fairfax at Rome. It came just as she was going off with some friends to spend the day at Frascati. She opened it later

with an exclamation of impatience. If the expression had not been too vulgar for a lady of her refinement, she could have said 'Drat!' Later, in contemplating what she had already achieved for the unlucky youth, she grew more resigned. 'Eton seemed so simple,' she said, with a sigh. 'Well, he must have a tutor now, I suppose, and cod-liver oil three times a day. If the boy *won't* get fat, I can't make him!'

CHAPTER VI

THE BOY

So Gervase returned to King's Stratton, and the first person he saw there was Lady Brereton, who had come down from Weybourne to bid him welcome. The sun shone; the dogs yapped about his feet; Mrs. Milman, the housekeeper—the tears in her eyes—grasped both his hands; while Bennett, the old butler, was scarcely less demonstrative, although he merely headed a group of servants waiting in the hall. The whole household received him romantically; his homeward journey, they knew well, had been longer and more perilous than the mere few hours from Eton.

'My dear, you have grown!' said Lady Brereton, looking fondly but anxiously at the pale, thin boy. 'You are nearly as tall as I am!'

He laughed, and measured his height against hers.

Gervase thought that there had never been such a home-coming before. He felt like a veteran warrior returned from action. The last three months had been a nightmare; but he had wakened from it to find himself, by the mercy

of God, at home. Tea was laid in the verandah —a heavenly tea with eggs, honey, a plum loaf, and gingerbread—and Marion Brereton was there with her mother, looking like a pretty china doll; her hair was done in two plaits, and she wore a Leghorn hat.

'How do you do, Gervase,' she said, offering her hand shyly. In her eyes there was something strange about him now. Three months had made a difference.

But to him everything was the same—ecstatically familiar. He drank in deep draughts of joy.

'Oh, how decent—how jolly decent!'

There was no more to be said; he reiterated the same phrase at intervals. But of school he was inexorably silent. His mouth was shut for ever. Marion afterwards complained to her mother that Gervase would tell her nothing at all about Eton. It was very natural; when one has passed through the fire, one speaks in preference of any other subject. That afternoon they roamed about the wood-walk, visited the farm, and searched in the kitchen-garden for strawberries, warm and full of sunshine. 'I remember that bit of borage, it flowered last year,' cried Gervase, in a triumph of new discovery; 'and the Scotch rose at the corner, and the holly-hocks on each side of the door, they are all just the same! Oh, how jolly decent!'

'You didn't expect them to be different, did you?' asked Marion, opening her grey eyes.

'No, I didn't expect them at all. I didn't think about them. But they were there all the

time. Don't you see? *That's* the decent thing!' Marion opened her eyes still wider.

During the night the boy woke every few hours, with premeditated purpose it seemed, so rapturous were these wakings. The linen lavender-scented sheets smelt of home. In the moonlight—for he always slept with blinds drawn back—the coloured prints of Mr. Sponge's Sporting Tour seemed to smile upon him! How full of jolly life they were, and also, because never very distinct to his short-sighted eyes, full of mystery too, like his room itself, with unexplained corners and queer lights and shadows. He had lain down to rest for this night—a night which stood out clear in his memory after many other important things had faded from it—at peace with God and with man. The crucifix that had once been his mother's, hanging above his bed, blessed him with arms outstretched in benediction. He kissed the sculptured feet as he had done when quite a little child.

'Soul of Christ, sanctify me;
Body of Christ, save me;
Passion of Christ, strengthen me;
O good Jesu, hear me:
In the hour of my death call me,
That with thy saints I may praise thee
For ever and ever. Amen.'

He prayed out of the fulness of his joy: devout thankfulness filled his heart; he was glad now, and more than glad, to be alive. The reaction from his misery had been almost as violent as the misery itself. Now his happiness engulfed

him ; he stretched himself in it luxuriously, and smiled and slept.

Next morning he went in search of the Souls, but here a disappointment awaited him ; it was not a great thing, but it was a disappointment none the less, and came like a cloud on the sunshine of his happiness. He was now bereft of a playmate, for little Kate had been sent away to a convent in Belgium to be educated. Miriam remained at home to help her mother, and attended a small school in the neighbourhood. She was fairly quick at her work, and by fits of excessive energy seemed to accumulate an enormous amount of time for idling. She stood now listlessly peering through the drawn Venetian blinds—drawn to protect Emma's new art carpet from the devastating sunlight—and seeing Gervase ran out to welcome him. She knew that he was expected home, but she had not thought of seeing him so soon.

'Hullo, Gervase !'

'Hullo, Miriam !'

Then there was silence, while Gervase poked the thick, soft dust about with the toe of his boot.

'How are you ?'

'Oh, I'm all right.'

The girl stood stolidly staring at him

Miriam was fifteen now and well grown ; she seemed a woman by the side of the tall, undeveloped stripling. The contempt that had always tinged her affection for him deepened as she looked.

'What a gawk !' she thought to herself.

Gervase did not consider Miriam's appearance at all. He did not see that she had fine eyes, a

pretty, sulky mouth, a polished skin and a graceful figure, full and round for her age. He saw none of these things; he was entirely unaware of them, and perhaps this fact, in some remote and subconscious way, was responsible for Miriam's quick judgment.

'Gervase Alleyne is an awful baby,' she told her mother afterwards. 'He is as queer as ever. He won't say anything about school. I expect the other boys gave him a fine doing! I hope they did,' she added scornfully, 'he wants it; he isn't a real boy at all.' A real boy, Miriam told herself, would have been aware of her existence by this time; he would have discovered how pretty she was, and would have found some way of letting her know his thoughts. But then a real boy would be in everything the antithesis of Gervase Alleyne. He would have had flashing, dare-devil eyes and strong hands; it would be delightful, and slightly perilous, to play with him. A real boy!

The pretty mouth looked sulkier than ever. There was nobody in King's Stratton who remotely answered to this description. Peter Brereton, whom she saw now and again in church, was a supercilious invalid, and the doctor's son, Jim Appleby, was too insignificant for a young woman of Miriam's age to consider. So she contented herself with curling her hair and reading penny novelettes, which she bought at the general store in the village. It was nice to imagine herself a heroine anyhow.

Gervase did not spend much of his precious

first morning with Miriam Souls. After the pair had strolled down the village street and had, at Miriam's instigation, bought some sherbet at the general shop, which they ate out of the palms of their hands as they went along, the boy found that there was really nothing to be said or even to be done. Miriam did not want to play at any of the old games. The mere suggestion of 'bobbies and thieves,' elicited from her a scornful 'Pooh,' and, indeed, Gervase himself had been rather shy in speaking of such an infantile amusement. It seemed incredible that it was only three months since he had left King's Stratton. So he bade her a good-bye, more awkward even than his salutation, and strolled off somewhat disconsolately in the direction of the Hall. But once inside the gates, the lovely atmosphere of 'home' again penetrated him, and he was happy. He wandered back to his old haunt in the wood-walk, and stretched himself out at full length on his back under Miss Kirkwood's ash. Here, from his bed of moss, he looked up at an intricate roof of green, stirring with innumerable living creatures. Glimpses of infinite blue, and the finite flicker of summer clouds like gossamer, shone through the windows of his roof.

How beautiful it all was and how strange! And beyond what he could see, he pondered, there was something stranger still—something that went on and on for ever. The thought was awful to him, and yet fascinating. The world of school had faded into a dream; it had become dim as a horrible story once read in a book and then forgotten. This was the reality—himself, Miss Kirkwood's

ash, and the great immeasurable depth of blue beyond, in which it seemed he almost looked on God.

After a time he moved; lovely as it was, he could not go on lying there for ever, and he wanted to find a good forked stick to make a catapult with. So he jumped up quickly, brushed the little twigs and bits of moss from his hair and turned to activities.

He lunched alone in the great empty dining-room, and the butler cut him his slice of cold beef and helped him to cherry-tart in respectful but affectionate silence. He was pleased at having the boy home again, and waited quite ready to chat if Gervase desired conversation; but the boy had propped up a magazine against a water-bottle and read it during the meal. Outside there was silence except for the hum of insects and the chatter of birds. Far-off noises from the village and the distant crowing of a cock only added to the peace.

Gervase did not look up until he found that he was being offered strawberries. This did not happen every day; it was in itself a welcome. He gave a sigh of content as he looked up into the kind old face. 'How ripping! Oh, I say, Bennett, it is so jolly decent to be back again!'

'Yes, sir,' replied the man. 'We all said that you would be thinking that.'

In the meantime Mrs. Willoughby Fairfax, confronted with the necessity for securing a tutor for her ward, issued advertisements and enquiries. These brought her a larger amount of correspondence than she had anticipated; she began to doubt

her powers of judgment in the matter, and fortunately for Gervase, transferred to Mr. Money the task of selection. Mr. Money, who had known Mary Alleyne, did not fail to think rather of what her wishes in this matter would have been than of his own predilections. Yet when the time came the decision was not difficult. Mark Hassall, upon whom his choice fell, had qualifications to fit him for other posts more eagerly competed for than any private tutorship, however well paid; and in Mrs. Willoughby Fairfax's opinion it was an additional point in his favour that he could go to King's Stratton at once. She wrote to Lady Brereton about the matter.

'The whole affair is intensely annoying,' ran her letter. 'Why could not Gervase remain at Eton like any other boy? This is exactly the sort of thing he would do. No other boy would go and get ill in his first term. The care of him is indeed a discipline. But I do not repine. I accept it as a part of life. Lady Mainwaring, such a charming woman, has just lent me a little book called '*Refined Gold*' that has been the greatest help to me. The words express so much. When one sees the *reason* for these troubles one can bear them.'

Lady Brereton read her letter aloud to the family assembled at breakfast. At this point she laid it down and, meeting her husband's eyes, broke into a peal of irrepressible laughter.

'Go on,' growled Kitten; 'there is something more or I'm much mistaken.'

Lady Brereton turned over the page and con-

tinued : 'It would be too sweet and good if you would go down to King's Stratton to-morrow and meet this Mr. Hassall. I told him to arrive somewhere about tea-time, and that you would probably be there. Tell him how eccentric and difficult the boy is, and how much he needs *looking after*. But you will know exactly what to say. I cannot tell you how grateful I was to you for receiving the unfortunate invalid when you did. And I am leaving this matter entirely to you. How sweet to have such a friend ! I have told Milman that Gervase is to take cod-liver oil three times a day —the nice, refined sort tasting of almonds. I am *so* anxious to do my best for Mary's boy.'

'To-morrow ! To-morrow is the Saviles' garden-party,' protested Peter.

'I can't go to the Saviles.'

'Can't go !' Kitten suddenly raged. 'Bless my soul ! Confound that woman's impertinence ! What claim has she on you ? Ab-so-lutely none !' His eyes flashed and his eyebrows bristled. Lady Brereton knew these danger-signals. She got up and laughingly laid her hand upon her husband's shoulder. 'The garden-party must take care of itself. I shall go to King's Stratton, Kitten—Oh, that poor child !'

The thought of Mark Hassall filled Gervase with trepidation. He longed for his coming and yet he feared it. To the lonely boy, accustomed to the sight of but few faces, in whose house there was no traffic with the outside world, no comings or goings, no bustle or noise or laughter, the

advent of this tutor was a huge event. A man was coming into his life to stay there for a long time. He would always be near him at morning and at noon, every meal would be eaten in his presence, and at night the same roof would cover them both. But Gervase had learnt now the futility of idealising the unknown, and did not intend to bestow his heart where it was not wanted. He wore it no longer on his sleeve, but concealed it so effectually that the casual observer might doubt of its existence. School had taught him that much. However, as he now waited the arrival of Mark Hassall, he could not prevent its pumping unusual blood into his cheeks or palpitating idiotically at the sound of wheels. The boy had scarcely recovered from his illness, and his nerves at the best of times were highly strung, so much so that at the moment when his tutor actually stood before him, all colour left his face ; he was pallid to the lips. However, he found his hand held in a warm, steadying grip while a pair of sympathetic eyes looked into his.

We are told that certain vibrations are continually emanating from the human frame, and that when two people stand in close contact with one another, the meeting of the subtle personal air or movement that surrounds them, independently of anything else, makes either for harmony or discord. This may account for sudden unpremeditated dislikes, and equally sudden affections.

It is certain that in this case, Gervase felt within him an immediate loosening of the tension, not only of the last hour but of the last few days, and

an equally immediate uprush of enthusiasm. In that one hand-grasp, and, in the flash of eyes mutually interested and expectant, the thing was done; a part of the untried region in the boy's nature had been touched suddenly, and he loved—the word, although he would have shrunk from uttering it, is not too strong for the quality of his enthusiasm, —he loved his tutor at first sight.

This, could he have divined it, would have been for Mark Hassall the greatest surprise of a surprising day. As it was, he felt almost bewildered by the difference between Mrs. Willoughby Fairfax's description and things as he found them. Not from any actual words but rather from what she had left unsaid he had prepared himself for a hard, unruly, incorrigible, stupid youth whom he would find 'difficult,' and for a mere barrack of a house although one containing a certain amount of costly furniture and valuable but no doubt hideous pictures. He found instead, a pupil intellectual, sensitive, and conscientious to an extraordinary degree, a boy weighted by a sense of responsibility alien to his years. But on him Mr. Hassall, for the present, reserved his judgment. The house he found to be a rambling, queer, old building of the Georgian period, full of old, quaint furniture; shining under the careful eye of Mrs. Milman. Old china, old embroidery, old books, a few sporting prints and pictures, told of the taste of its former inhabitants. Lady Mary's rooms, furnished just as of old with her rose-coloured curtains and painted saints, breathed a different atmosphere and one that had been peculiarly her own, but these

rooms were always kept shut. Mrs. Milman, however, in exhibiting the place, unlocked the doors and pointed out in whispers the few things of interest that had belonged to her ladyship. Hassall noticed that both she and Bennett spoke of Gervase's father and mother with a reverence that was almost awe.

The young man went up to his room and unpacked his belongings, possessed by a queer sense of out-of-dateness; it was as though King's Stratton Hall had skipped a period in the world's history. At that time people had emerged from the heaviness of mid-Victorian ideals, and had turned their attention to art and William Morris: but King's Stratton manor-house had slept through even the heavy mahogany era, and knew nothing of massive velvet curtains and gilt cornices. Hassall looked out of the window, and the garden, it seemed, slept also; well-kept near the house, which was reached on the other side through an avenue of venerable trees, the rest lay in a peaceful tangle of blossoming wilderness. House and garden seemed to have slumbered for years; and indeed they slumbered still, as much as any enchanted sleeping palace that was ever told of. King's Stratton Hall and its boy owner were strange; they were unlike other houses and other boys; both in a sense had missed something, and yet both, perhaps because of that very loss, held something else—a quality unique and their own—a gain that transcended all regret.

Mark Hassall felt as though he had appeared suddenly upon the first scene of a play and was expected to do something. What—he hardly knew.

But the boy, it seemed, knew. For later on, when he came up to bid his tutor good-night, his eyes, which veiled and yet hinted at a depth of character that was to Hassall almost startling, held in them a queer look of expectancy, and, as the door shut, the man turned back into the empty room with a sudden resolve to fulfil these expectations, whatever they might be, to the utmost limit.

The work that he had casually undertaken had become touched with seriousness. But Mark Hassall, like Gervase Alleyne, had that rare quality of tracing immense issues in the commonplace things of life, which endowment is one peculiar to the religious mind.

That night, before he went to bed, Gervase made an entry in his diary.

August 3, 1893.—My anxiety is at an end. *He* has come. Mark Hassall is a decent chap and I am awfully fond of him already. It is ripping to be awfully fond of anybody. This man might lead an army. He is courageous but at the same time kind. He has a look of Napoleon about him mixed up with St. Francis. He would be able to say 'Welcome Sister Death' quite easily, and I expect that even when he was a new boy he would have known how to wallop any fellow who ragged him. I prayed to God to-night and thanked Him from the bottom of my heart. I am happier than I have ever been, I think. My head aches with it—thumping rather—I expect it's my beastly illness. And I can't sleep. I have got up to write all this down at the window. Still I'm jolly happy. I think of Mr. Hassall sleeping just down the corridor. I wonder if he has got a mother and if he is very keen on games. It is jolly to be in the same world with such a chap. He would understand all right if one was short-sighted and bad at

cricket. There are an awful lot of things to talk to him about, and he is going to be here always. That is one of the things that makes me happy. I want to ask him if it is the usage of our Church that I should pray to mother as well as to God, because I always do. If that is a fond superstition I think that I shall be Roman Catholic, only I really could not accept the Infallibility of the Pope. No Englishman could. Lady Brereton brought me down a Nottingham reel from Peter when she came. I shall show it to Mr. Hassall to-morrow. Now I must go to bed although if I stayed up longer I could write pages. Still I shan't.

Mark Hassall was at the time when he came to King's Stratton twenty-six years old. He had left Oxford with a brilliant degree, and after the three years which had elapsed, he was still undecided as to his ultimate future—although during this period of waiting, that future was actually shaping itself, determined principally by the fact that he was the only son of his mother, and she a widow of small means. Before he realised what this factor would mean in his life, the young man's aspirations had taken a definite direction. There existed in him, by the side of intellectual powers of the first order, a strong spiritual consciousness, and this consciousness showed itself in a desire to reject the hurries incumbent upon worldly success, for that supreme peace known only to the ascetic. While yet looking at the future merely as it regarded himself, he had decided that for him life's more excellent way would be that passed in a Brotherhood—our Western equivalent for the yellow robe and the begging bowl. This decision had not—

at his age—been arrived at without some struggle. It is more difficult to renounce the world, the flesh, and the devil before acquaintance than after. The world, for the young, means only material success in life ; the flesh, imagination made fact ; and the devil, that fertility and ingenuity of the intellect which, as it did of old, promises the crown of Godhead. All is seen dimly. But there are possibilities in the unknown : there is glamour in the dark glass. The young man in rejecting it, is rejecting a thousand times more than the man who has tested everything and found it wanting. One brings a dead past to the sacrifice ; the other a living and alluring future. So Mark Hassall fought his first battle and won it, apparently to no purpose. For upon further envisaging of the facts, it was evident that he could not—except in an inward and ideal sense—give up the world, when that renunciation would mean the desertion of the one creature who had definite claims upon him—his mother. Here duty fought against his supreme desire. Sacrifice itself had, in a sense, to be laid upon the altar. So with a sigh he abandoned the dream, and turning again to the grammar of things, took up school-mastering, as the readiest way of converting his acquirements into an income. He put the idea of taking orders away from him ; he could never have borne the active life of a clergyman in the Church of England, with its cheerful heroism in small things, its many organisations, its Mothers' Meetings and Bands of Hope. Indeed, with the female portion of his congregation a want of tact

would at every turn have hampered him. Mark Hassall knew nothing of women and, born recluse that he was, feared and distrusted them. For a matter of two years, while doing his work as form master in a London public school, he had been living quietly with his mother, and in his spare time making some approaches to the profession of literature. School work had no attraction for him ; he did not care for boys in the mass ; the fortunes of his form eleven left him cold, and Mrs. Willoughby Fairfax's advertisement, which at Mr. Money's instigation had been made generous in its terms, offered a great enlargement of spiritual freedom and intellectual leisure for the moment, without any immediate sacrifice of the material interest which he was bound to pursue. And since ultimate advancement in the scholastic profession was not set among his objects to be attained, he offered himself for the post of guardian and tutor to Gervase Alleyne.

Thus did there come into the life of this boy whom we are watching—and watching carefully, so as not to let slip a single event of importance that might go to the shaping of a destiny—a man brilliant, forcible, and attractive, who would draw him as a magnet draws a needle, or a snake a bird ; and who was, with all the force of his being, by nature though not by habit, a monk. Gervase was still a child, the great awakening of his manhood was yet to come, but never was an inherited strain of asceticism more carefully nurtured than in him, first by his mother, and then by this man whom he was prepared to worship. Even the long

period of hardness and solitude, from the time of his mother's death to the coming of this new influence, a period culminating in the months of anguish passed at the great public school, had helped its work. Gervase was still a child, thinking and speaking as a child, yet there was that in him which worked inexorably towards his appointed future.

CHAPTER VII

AD INTERIM

And now time trotted with Gervase Alleyne. Nights and days, alternating light and darkness, floated by him gloriously like pictures on a screen. It seemed as though he moved in a new world. Every morning, when he threw open his bedroom window, the grass seemed sweeter, the trees fairer than ever before; they had power to stir him, he detected in them a soul that was akin to his. He never spoke of these things, even to Mark Hassall; but gradually, and to his great astonishment, he discovered that these same thoughts (in a degree not comparable to his own weak boyish imagination—he saw that much) had thrilled dead hearts. Wordsworth had lived before him, and John Keats. Gervase discovered poetry. And he discovered too, being now for the first time under the guidance of a sympathetic scholar, something of 'the glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome.' He learnt to declaim with joy the choruses of Prometheus Vinctus, whose words have the jagged brilliance of lightning; he learnt to mouth over the long roll of those hexameters in

which Virgil tells of famous rivers gliding under antique battlements, or of irrigating streams let in suddenly upon the sweltering cornlands and allaying the drought of the parched clods. In short, he began to move easily in a world of books, whose horizon broadened daily.

But his actual world, almost without his knowing it—so happy was he, so ecstatic in his new discoveries—straitened. One by one small luxuries were dropped, and a more rigid rule of life observed. Certain times were set apart for silence and for prayer, and if amusement clashed with these duties, then amusement was without a word abandoned. In any decision it became natural to him to choose the difficult way as being obviously, by reason of its very difficulty, the best—the way acceptable to God. His inner life grew every day in intensity. Without exaggeration he loved the Lord his God, as he had written many years ago in his diary, 'with all his heart, and mind, and soul, and strength.' He might even at this period of his life have said with St. Martin, 'God was my passion.'

He was nearly sixteen before he was confirmed. Month by month the sense of responsibility grew upon him, and the sacrament was by his own wish delayed. When at last the time came it was May, and a spring of extraordinary beauty. Anèmones and dog-violets starred the grass. The blossoming trees bent with a weight of glorious promise. In the bed below his window sturdy wall-flowers towered in russet gold behind a fringed carpet of blue forget-me-nots, and a hundred other flowers

opened out in the herbaceous border. The air was full of the miraculous sweetness of the spring. Gervase never forgot that year; it seemed as though life had no more to offer him. The secret of his happiness, of which he himself was scarcely aware, was in reality the fact that he had, for the first time in his life, met with sympathy. He had no need now to tell his thoughts to a tree, for here was a living man, and one fulfilling his ideal of all a man should be, who neither ridiculed nor disapproved. And each event of his confirmation day, the crown and centre of this *annus mirabilis*, was stamped upon his mind and heart indelibly.

He had walked with Mark Hassall through the avenue and up the long village street to the parish church, where he was met by Mr. Money, who had given him all necessary instruction. But the instruction was for Gervase merely a superficial thing, the reality of the Divine had entered like a fire into the boy's life.

'I feel the presence of God everywhere,' he wrote that night in his diary, 'it is more real to me than myself. When I take a deep breath I feel as if I were entirely one with Him. It is extraordinary to me that there are people in the world who say that there is no God. It is almost as if they were born without something that might correspond to eyes.'

There were other candidates brought to the Bishop that day for Confirmation. Marion Brereton, half hidden in her white veil, knelt on the other side of the church, and behind her, strangely out of place, was Miriam Souls, in her

exuberant beauty. Marion was like a small, staid and compact white daisy. Her eyes were downcast, her cheeks held their usual pink, and she wore her hair brushed smoothly on each side of her face. Miriam, sitting near her, glowed with colour ; strands of dark hair swept her flushed neck, and her red lips curved into their habitual pout. One girl was calmly happy, doing without self-consciousness what she considered to be her duty ; the other was simply bored, except in so far as the Confirmation gave her an opportunity of wearing a new dress, and seeing in the glass her pretty face set off by a white veil.

Of the three, the boy only was touched by the Divine fire ; and only for the boy did the heavens open. When he lifted his head from his hands and stood up to walk for the first time to the altar, his eyes were the source of a glory that illumined his whole face. So might Galahad have looked towards the vision of the Grail.

Lady Brereton, watching him, bent her head in prayer. He was so young, so confident, so strangely, miraculously inspired.

When Gervase returned to his seat Marion Brereton was praying. She prayed carefully and with great pains ; when she had finished she shut her prayer-book and clasped it. She intended for the future to be a very good girl indeed. Miriam repeated a collect. *Amen* arrived at, she studied Mr. Hassall through her fingers, and wondered if he could ever marry any one. She had not the least intention of being gooder than usual, although she did not formulate this decision in actual words.

Lady Brereton had now for some time watched the march of events at King's Stratton doubtfully. She did not know what to think. Gervase seemed to be drifting away from her. He no longer needed to be mothered, and although he treated her always with affection, she could see that it was Mr. Hassall who had his heart and his confidence; and Mr. Hassall did not encourage either her presence or Marion's at King's Stratton. He came up to Weybourne garden-parties, indeed, with the boy, and distinguished himself at lawn-tennis; he was always good-looking and interesting—his manners were delightful. But Millicent Savile christened him 'the inaccessible Mr. Hassall,' and had used every art she knew to render him more possible.

Her husband watched her solemnly. Richard Savile was long, and thin, and serious; his jokes always had a dejected aspect. To-day he stroked his long chin with his long hand in commiseration, for his wife's failure was palpable.

'Poor Millicent! You have worked hard, but —such a one-sided affair!'

'What's the man made of!' said Mrs. Savile hotly; 'I am tired out with my efforts to please. Not even a smile——'

'Oh, come,' interrupted Kitten, 'he did nothing but smile; he's got jolly good teeth, too!'

'Oh, *that* sort of smile! A smile to the general!' She spoke petulantly, looking round at the small group of intimate friends gathered under the trees after one of Lady Brereton's parties.

'When is a smile not a smile?' asked Kitten vaguely; but nobody replied.

'I know what it is!' went on Millicent. 'He is religious! He is Christian flying from the City of Destruction. I'm the City of Destruction.'

'Oh, no,' murmured Peter, now a young man of nineteen, 'not so bad as that, dear Mrs. Savile!'

'I'd got a jolly good answer to that riddle,' interpolated Kitten gloomily. 'Don't you want to hear it?'

'Then what am I, I'd like to know?' Mrs. Savile was still preoccupied with her more concrete problem. 'He's a wall, that is what he is! So handsome—so amusing—and a wall! You can't talk to a wall for ever. I shall give him up.'

'You can never bring in a wall—what say you, Bottom?' murmured her husband. 'I like your imagery, dear City of Destruction—it's so vivid. Do you know what people say about Hassall down at King's Stratton?'

'No,' replied Lady Brereton, half curiously. 'If this is going to be a story, do begin.'

'They say that Hassall is planting a maze round the house, so that when people go to call they will be lost for ever. Their bones will bleach in the sun. One day a hundred Princesses will be turned loose in the maze. They will all die but one, and she——'

'Will be rewarded by the hand of the sleeping Prince!'

'Not a bit of it!' Richard Savile looked mysterious.

'What, then?

'This is what will happen. The ninety-nine Princesses will walk, and walk, and walk through all the bleaching bones until they die.'

'You have said that before!'

'But at the end, the hundredth Princess——'

'Oh, do go on,' said Sir James, 'I feel quite queer!' Indeed, Kitten's eyes were always fidgety.

'The hundredth Princess will find at the very heart of the maze——'

'What?'

'The beautiful skeleton of a young man. You see the Prince did not sleep when he was expected to. He was wakeful; the spell did not work, and in the end the maze killed him.'

There was sudden silence. Then Lady Brereton jumped up decisively.

'What a horrible story! Now, I think that Mr. Hassall is a charming man. He is doing Gervase no end of good.'

'Oh! oh!'

'Yes, indeed he is. Even Peter thinks so; don't you, Peter?'

'Well, Gervase isn't as queer as he used to be! I must say that. Mr. Hassall has taught him to play tennis too, quite respectably. He isn't such a pi- idiot, either. He has been headed off that, apparently at least, I'm not sure—one never knows: people say different things. Still, Mr. Hassall is tremendously a man of the world, and——'

'Man of the world!' screamed Mrs. Savile. 'Man of the *next* world! He is flying from this

one. Oh,' she relapsed into gloom, 'I forgot, it's only *me* he is flying from.'

Millicent Savile put into words something of the feeling that every pretty woman had towards Mark Hassall. They resented a homage lacking the element of sex. A marble statue or a painting might be admired in that way. The fact that he was extremely good-looking merely increased their annoyance.

But with middle-aged or working women, very young girls and old ladies, his popularity was immense. They exacted no worship, and they received instead an unexpected deference. They were made to feel that their opinion was a weighty matter, and against such flattery no human being is safe.

Mrs. Milman at the Hall was full of his praises, although she disapproved heartily of the changes that had taken place both in the house and in the manner of life there.

'I don't know why it is that I always let that Mr. Hassall have his own way so much!' she declared one day in confidence to Bennett. ''Tisn't that I have such particular faith in his judgment, but he seems to have a loving manner with him that beats me. And as for Master Gervase —well, he be a different lad since the tutor's been here! Not that I hold with their fasting all Fridays, which is a most expensive habit, considering the price of fish! But there—Lady Mary always did the same. It's funny that I should have clean forgotten all that until Mr. Hassall came along with the same sort of ideas. Not that I believe

one straw in them fish baskets from the coasts, so much a pound and a great choice—the sweepings of the boats, I call 'em! Fresh, yes, but what's the good o' fresh skin or fresh bone, although I dare say Mr. Hassall 'ud as leef have that as good salmon or turbot. There never was a gentleman that knew less of what was set before him, and now Master Gervase is growing every bit as bad!'

So time went on. The quiet days repeated themselves until Gervase woke up one morning to find that he was eighteen years old.

There had been, however, certain breaks in the monotony of his life. Hassall had once taken him to London, and during that visit Mrs. Willoughby Fairfax suddenly remembered her nephew's existence and showered invitations upon him and upon his tutor. Had they wished it, they could have made engagements for every night of their brief holiday. As it was, Gervase made the acquaintance of the National Gallery and Wagner's operas, and these two things remained with him as marvellous personal experiences when all the rest had faded into the common working stuff of memory. He brought to the one an eye educated in art by the few good specimens of Italian, Dutch, and English pictures that hung in the gallery of his own house, and to the other a true ear, combined with an intuitive appreciation of sound, and the laws that govern it. The rush of the Valkyries, the *Hoyotoho* of their battle cry, woke him afterwards more than once, during the quiet summer nights at home, when he sat up

breathlessly in bed, only to hear the croaking of the frogs coming from the river, or the faint note of some wakeful fledgling.

This London visit was not the only time he left King's Stratton, for once he spent a few weeks with his old friend Jack Denham; and after that Jack, and also Mrs. Willoughby Fairfax, came at different times to stay at the Hall. But these short periods of relaxation only occurred in the holidays, for Mark Hassall had divided the year rigidly into the usual school terms; and after they were over the quiet old house, now saturated with the atmosphere of constant prayer, sank back, it seemed, into its old peace with a sort of sigh.

When Mrs. Willoughby Fairfax came to visit her nephew she brought some of her fashionable friends with her, and the strange ladies, with their gay frocks and impertinent pretty faces, had seemed oddly out of place at King's Stratton. Gervase was glad when they had gone.

'What an odd place!' one lady had exclaimed on looking at Mark Hassall's study. The bare table and floor, the few books, the crucifix on the white-washed wall had filled her with dismay. 'It is like a monk's cell!' Hassall smiled; that was what he would have wished it to be.

He and the boy went back to their work and the garden with a renewed sense of the unseen life that surrounded them—the life of the company of heaven.

'I like to think of the invisible world that is so near,' Gervase wrote in his diary about this time, 'and near, not in imagination, but in fact. Colour is only a certain

vibration of the air, and there are innumerable vibrations to which our eyes are not sensitive. This has been proved by science. The unseen colour is there, it is our power to see it that is lacking. I like the idea, for it explains my mother's rainbow angels whom I used to think of as sitting in the trees and singing. The whole world is glowing with a glory that is inconceivable to man ; and more, it is singing with the morning stars and like the sons of God shouting for joy. And this also is not imagination. Sound, like colour, is vibration, but of a different kind ; and there are sounds above and below that small gamut of vibrations to which our ears are sensitive. The voice of the leaves and the orchestration of great trees is as dumb to us as are the shouts of the sons of God. But all around rises the universal harmony. "We praise Thee, O God ; we acknowledge Thee to be the Lord !"'

One day, after a period of prolonged tranquillity, a letter arrived from Jack Denham which filled Gervase with sudden joyful excitement.

'I am coming to stay at the Vicarage to be coached by Money,' it said. 'You and Hassall are getting moss-grown ; it is quite time some one came to stir you up a bit ! So look out ! One fine day I shall turn up at the Hall to perform that duty !'

King's Stratton Hall ! The name could always draw an exclamation from Jack. 'Oh, Cherubim and Seraphim, *what* a place !'

After he had been with Gervase for four days on his first visit, he wrote home to his sister as follows :—

Dear Florence—The people here are all too jolly intimate with the Higher Powers—that's what's the

matter with them! I'm only a frail creature of dust, and feeble as frail, but the truth is I couldn't stay here for another minute if it wasn't for the Cook—she is a rosy dream, and cheers me up wonderfully four times a day. Of course words aren't good enough for Gervase; he's a splendid chap and clever too, stunningly clever—reads philosophy like Punch and knows all about Kant and those old codgers. But he ought to leave the Almighty alone, and not go pottering round advising Him how to order the course of the world. He can't want Gervase's opinion morning, noon, and night—sung too, for they make a deadly screeching twice a day, which they call plainsong. He *can't* like it (the Almighty I mean), can He? How do they know He likes it? There's a lot of side in those religious blighters—they know a sight too much. But the fact of the whole matter is, I just can't stick an inner life.—Your affectionate brother,

JACK DENHAM.

When Gervase went to stay with the Denhams he did not interest any of the family very much; it was only when King's Stratton Rectory was proposed as a convenient place for Jack to stay at when reading for Magdalen, that any one remembered the existence of Gervase Alleyne. It was arranged then that Jack should go for a period to Mr. Money to try and acquire, through him, some of the information necessary for matriculation, that he had somehow missed at Eton.

'I am awfully glad you are going,' the same Florence had announced with sisterly calm. 'You're awful, these holidays; the whole house is full of you.'

Therefore one morning the letter explaining the situation, in a style cheerful and limited as Jack himself, brought to Gervase a sudden breath

of outside air. Mark Hassall did not share his enthusiasm ; he scoffed at Gervase's praise of his friend.

'Life! Originality! My dear fellow, Denham is the most hackneyed of all modern types, and he is suffering from the most hackneyed of all modern diseases. What are the symptoms? Eats well, sleeps well, but the mere thought of work produces cold shivers. I wish I had the curing of that young man!'

Gervase went on with his breakfast in silence ; for the first time he felt a certain limitation of sympathy in the beloved master.

But these two people—Mark Hassall and Jack Denham—did not like each other ; there was no getting over the fact ; these queer dislikes did occur sometimes, and were, after all, only an affair of personal atmosphere ; for such misfortunes nobody could be blamed.

The thing was more apparent when Denham was actually settled at the Rectory. The contrast between Cyril Money's attitude to the newcomer and that of Mark Hassall was obvious.

'Oh, Miserere!' said Gervase to himself ; 'how they do loathe each other!'

'Why don't the devil-dodger own up?' said Jack one day, in complaining of what he called Hassall's insolence ; 'why don't he come out into the open, and put on a jam-pot collar, and a pig-driver hat, and have done with it?'

'He doesn't want to be a parson,' retorted Gervase, as ready to defend Hassall to Denham as he was ready to do battle for Jack against his

tutor. 'I wish to goodness you wouldn't be so narrow, Jack. It is all your fault that you are not friends. You are so beastly set against him.'

But Denham, although he kept his thoughts to himself, knew better.

Later on the diary contained the following entry :—

September 12, 1897.—Jack's coming has been rather like a stone dropped in a quiet pond ; we are all stirred by the vibration. I never knew any one so full of life. He and the Padre don't get on at all, they are at opposite poles. I seem to be a kind of connecting link between them. Jack has no religion, as far as I can see, and the queer thing is that it doesn't seem to hurt him. That is so odd. If my religion were taken away from me the whole world would crumble ; there would be no more meaning in life. But if I were to tell that to Jack he would not know what on earth I was driving at. Jack stands to me for that part of the world which fills the writer of the *Imitation* with such terror, and yet which must be good because God made it. The Mystics knew that. '*All that is, is good ; there is no evil, for evil is nothingness.*' '*The wages of sin is death.*'

To me there is a kind of romance about Jack (how he would scoff if he read this !). He makes me think of an imaginary being called Percival, who was the solace of my childhood, and whom I endowed with all kinds of heroic attributes. I don't know whether Percival could do Latin prose without howlers—I never thought about that, but for all the rest he is exceedingly like Jack. Jack's having come is making a good deal of difference to these last months ; life is certainly jollier here, and this time next year I shall be thinking of Oxford. Jack is reading for Magdalen : I go to the House.

September 20, 1897.—I wonder if I shall always remain the solitary being I am now. I meet people at

Weybourne, men of my own age who are at Sandhurst, others from the Varsity, but so far we have extraordinarily little to say to one another. They don't like me and, for my part, a paralysing silence creeps over me when I am with them. I can only talk monosyllabic commonplaces, or if I talk at all, I talk too much. I think I should petrify if it were not for the Padre. It always consoles me when I get back from social functions of any kind at which I have been a howling failure, to read the 'Imitation.' *One said,* '*As oft as I have been among men I returned home less a man than I was before.*' '*It is easier for a man to keep at home than to keep himself well when he is abroad. He therefore that intends to attain to the more inward and spiritual things of religion, must, with Jesus, depart from the multitude and press of people.*'

I have a growing feeling, however, that there is a fallacy somewhere, and that perhaps if I got on better with the '*press of people*,' I shouldn't agree so fervently with this. I don't want to think that this is so, and add self-deception to my other sins. I think I am worse with women—more petrified I mean. On this point I feel extraordinarily. I cannot explain it. I don't believe I am a woman-hater, in fact I know I'm not. The Padre *is*—naturally. I found that out ages ago. I feel that if I once loved a woman it would be all right. Of course I have my dreams—everybody has, I suppose ; but it is the women themselves who shatter them. All the girls I meet are always chaffing and rotting ; it would be *impossible* to think of love in connection with any of them.

Love has become for me a thing of the imagination, as imaginary as my friendship with Percival and as fantastic. Here it seems as if imagination and fact can never be united. That impossible she ! Shall I ever say that *not* impossible she ? I expect that in ten years' time I shall look back upon these meanderings of youth, and laugh. I am horribly afraid of anybody guessing my thoughts—and, oh, good Heavens ! the woman herself more than all ! Well, *qui vivra verra !*

CHAPTER VIII

ON THE THRESHOLD

Jack Denham soon became a *persona grata* at King's Stratton. He was intimate with everybody in the place, and as often to be found in Emma Souls' little house as at Weybourne Park. He heard all about the sad demise of Captain Henry Jason Arthur Souls on the Benin river. He sympathised with the good lady's unhappiness at being forced to relinquish the style of life to which, she assured him, she had always been accustomed, and when he had got to know the family very well indeed (which happened in about three days from the date of his arrival), he did a good deal to allay the perpetual discord of the Souls' household. He established a sort of indeterminate flirtation with Miriam, and that young lady displayed to him, very engagingly, all the qualities which, to her thinking, masculine taste values in a woman. From her he obtained news of his new neighbours.

Sir James Brereton, she said, was a flibberty-gibberty little man, more like a counter-jumper than a baronet. Lady Brereton was a soft soul,

with no style. Mrs. Savile was smart and had a shocking tongue. Mr. Savile was funny—serious, and wrote; he was like a May-pole with a face a mile long. 'That's all, except the Applebys,' she added in conclusion, 'and they don't count; nobody cares for them. You know all about Mr. Money.'

Miriam had compassed the whole of King's Stratton society—there was not much of it—in half a dozen sentences.

'What about Mr. Alleyne?' said Jack. 'You have left him out!'

'*Mister* Alleyne!' Miriam made a face. 'If you mean Gervase, I have known him nearly all my life, and he is mad.'

'Mad!' Jack broke out into a round laugh. 'He's no madder than you are, my dear.' (It is doubtful if he had ever, since the first five minutes of his acquaintance with her, addressed Miriam as Miss Souls.) 'Certainly he is no madder than I am; I think probably he is the sanest of the lot of us.'

The girl pulled up her pretty sulky lips into a pout. 'You don't know the funny things that go on up at the Hall.' She nodded at him mysteriously, and the pout vanished; her lips now seemed to be compressed upon further information.

'What things?'

'Well, we once had a girl whose brother was second footman at Weybourne, and he told her, and she told me, that Mr. Savile was once talking about Gervase Alleyne at dinner——'

'Heavens, what a complication!' interpolated

Denham. 'And what did Mr. Savile say? I should like to hear a story three times removed from the original.'

'He said that every week Mr. Hassall and Gervase beat each other for a penance, until the blood ran.'

'Fiddlesticks!'

''Tisn't!'

'Moonshine!'

'I believe it's true!' Miriam nodded her head emphatically; her lips were parted now, and her eyebrows slightly raised. 'There is something *awful* about that Mr. Hassall.'

'Was there anything else?'

'Yes. But I shan't tell you. You said "fiddlesticks!"'

'I retract. *Please* go on.'

'Well, Mr. Savile said—I don't know if this is true, but Mr. Savile said it was, at least so Ann's brother told her, and she told me—Mr. Savile said that on Good Fridays, Gervase and Mr. Hassall crawl all the way up that twisty staircase to the oratory, on their—faces.'

'How can they crawl on their faces?' He became suddenly aware that Miriam had supplied a euphemism, and smiled.

'They do,' she went on, 'and they make Bennett and Mrs. Milman follow them in the same position.'

Jack threw back his head and shouted with laughter. Miriam's emphatic expression, and her evident belief in the absurd story, added to the picture she had brought before his eyes, was irresistible.

'I don't think it is funny!' said Miriam, offended. 'I think it is simply *horrible*. It is a disgrace that such things should go on in the Church of England. Gervase puts fresh flowers in that oratory every day. Fancy a man picking flowers! I call it stupid.'

'Yes, it is rather stupid, I acknowledge,' said Jack Denham, recovering himself from the effects of his vivid imagination. 'Tell me something else that Mr. Savile said.'

But here Emma Souls opened the door suddenly. 'Sorry to interrupt your conversation, but Mirry must go to the kitchen now, it's the girl's night out. Were you talking about anything interesting?' she added pleasantly.

'We were talking about the Madness of Gervase Alleyne,' replied Denham—'good title that for a book!—but it's not really madness, Mrs. Souls; it's only a return to mediævalism.'

'Well, I consider that is just as bad,' replied Emma severely; 'I don't hold with such things—so peculiar, you know! I don't quite know what mediævalism is, but I expect it's something Roman Catholic, and that I can't bear!—Now, Miriam, you be off with you! Don't stand loitering there; there's the rennet to put to that junket.'

She returned graciously to the young man. 'You'll stay to supper, Mr. Denham, now won't you? Do. No difference, you know; I treat you like one of ourselves; veal and ham pie, junket and stewed currants, with bottled ale to drink—you can mix it with ginger-beer, you

know, and make it shandy-gaff. I dare say you get all sorts of little kickshaws at the Hall, such as I was used to when I was a young girl, and champagne. But you see times have changed for me, and what we have we offer you with a hearty welcome.'

Jack thanked her cordially and accepted the invitation. He always listened with patience to the poor faded lady with the imaginary past. Her stories of the scandal that had never been spoken, and of the purple doings of the lord who never was on sea or land, made him laugh. But at the same time he pitied her, and his attentive attitude was in some degree a compensation to Emma for her daughter's impatience.

'Oh lor, Ma, how you do go on!' Miriam would say petulantly; 'I don't believe there ever was any such person as that Lord Fitz Robert!'

'*You'll* never meet any such person, poor child!' Emma would answer compassionately; 'our circumstances don't permit of our moving in such circles.'

Jack Denham liked the Souls family. In their presence he always experienced a delightful relaxation of body and of soul; he rested his limbs, his mind, and his morals. Emma was not clever, but then she was not particular. The meals, of which she or Miriam always superintended the cooking, were abundant, and exceedingly good of their kind. Jack supplied the household with whisky, which he kept in the side-board cupboard, and Emma saw that, when he wanted it, a syphon of soda-water was forthcoming.

Mr. Money had no idea how his pupil expanded under the influence of Emma and Miriam Souls. At the Rectory he was a raw ignorant youth ; in the Souls' cottage, a full-blown and experienced man of the world. He talked on almost every subject, and discussed the private affairs of eminent men and women—especially statesmen, and actresses—with an intimate knowledge, and a precise attention to detail.

Emma always enjoyed his stories, and when he had finished telling them he listened to hers, and for that she was grateful ; while Miriam admired his clothes and sewed buttons on his gloves, affectionately, whenever she got the chance.

Somewhat to his own surprise, Mr. Money's tuition proved successful, and in the autumn Jack Denham matriculated at Magdalen, and for the time passed out of the life of King's Stratton.

Gervase Alleyne meditated his plunge into the unknown world in the autumn of the following year ; for it had been arranged that he should go to Oxford at the opening of the Michaelmas term, and when the task of the lad's instruction was to pass into other hands, Mark Hassall intended to return home. His mother was growing more feeble every day, and it had become apparent during the last few months that very shortly he would be free to choose any life he might desire. But he did not dwell upon that subject : indeed he hardly looked forward at all. Only when the time came, and Hassall stood

in the doorway at King's Stratton bidding his pupil and dear friend good-bye, his feeling at this last moment was profound. But he veiled it, according to his custom, by an impassive countenance.

'Good-bye, old chap. We have had some good times together.'

Gervase also found the parting difficult. Mark Hassall had been to him for years—father, mother, brother, and teacher: five years at nineteen is a lifetime.

Talk was unnecessary: Hassall knew all that the lad wanted to say.

'Good-bye.'

Gervase jumped into the dog-cart and gathered up the reins, his face hard set. When he returned to his home Mr. Hassall would no longer be an inmate there. A period of his life was over—a happy period suffused with quiet sunshine: he could not see it pass away without emotion. He felt as though he owed to this friend some vital part of his being, and indeed he did. When Hassall had first come to King's Stratton he had found a child of strong individuality, yet an individuality made plastic by affection. This he had so moulded, that under his hand certain inborn tendencies had grown into an ineradicable part of a vigorous nature. Hassall now let him go without a word of warning or of advice. He had said all he wanted to, not in the last five minutes of parting, but during five years of constant companionship.

As the dog-cart rolled away through the Hall

gates the lodge-keeper curtseyed to the young master with a valedictory smile; it would be two months before the place would see him again—two months, as we count time, but to Gervase how much longer! He took a slow backward look at his beloved avenue; one or two trees showed yellow against a mass of heavy green, and in those more transparent boughs the rooks' nests were solid and lumpy. Along the lane, outside the gates, dew-covered gossamer hung on purple brambles.

'How jolly gossamer is with the dew on it!' The young man spoke loud—a habit acquired in solitude—and as he said the words they sounded like some repetition of words used in bygone years; indeed his mood to-day seemed but a reverberation of something gone before. During the greater part of the drive to the station he was pursued by two intangible emotions—the one a haunting memory, the other a new and vibrant sense of expectation. It was not that he dreaded Oxford. He already knew Denham and one or two other men in their first year, and the word 'fresher' had no terrors for him; it was something else that held him now, something less material that hung upon his heart. He remembered the depression that had so overwhelmingly attacked his early youth; during the years he had spent with Mark Hassall he had been able to control it. It was a sin in his tutor's eyes —the sin of *accidie*, which had to be fought by a definite weapon—concentration upon the opposing virtue. There was the remedy. But now, during this glorious autumn drive, the thing was

on him again. Perhaps the keen pain of the parting with his master had brought it about, but that had nothing morbid in it; it was a clean-cut painful emotion. He could not tell; he only knew that some vague presage, tentative and infinitely sad, had fallen on his soul.

'I don't know what it is—but I want it.' All his life the reaching after the unattainable had filled him with unrest. It was the dual heritage of the Faun.

The mood had its way with him. Plunged in meditation he let the horse guess at his road, until a sudden turn brought the dog-cart sharply up against a small farmer's gig.

'Whoa there, you fool——' The man stopped suddenly when he saw who the careless driver was.

Gervase pulled his scattered wits from the winds and used his wrists to some purpose. He nearly upset the gig as he swung the cob sharp to the left, but he saved the situation. 'There might have been a devil of a smash,' he said between his teeth; 'mooning idiot that I am!'

The man went on with his broken sentence. 'Near thing, Sir,' was all he said in conclusion.

A young girl sat by the farmer's side with luggage piled up high at her back. She had not made a sound, but leaning forward on tightly-clasped hands, had awaited the catastrophe. Now she was free to breathe again, and, looking up, saw something that drew from her a quick cry, not of fear but of pleasure.

'It's Gervase! It's Gervase Alleyne!'

The young man reddened under his sunburn.

He cursed his short-sighted eyes and his idiotic memory. Who on earth was she?

Then he stammered an unintelligible apology, but the girl, brimming over with laughter and mischief, would not let him off so easily.

'Oh, Gervase,' she said reproachfully, 'don't you remember me?'

She must have been eighteen, but Gervase did not realise much more than her brown eyes and a certain golden bloom that pervaded her face and made him think of a favourite picture—why he did not know, since there was nothing about her, except the glowing texture of the flesh, to remind him of Giorgione. Yet, afterwards, the episode stuck in his memory, and always the face that looked out at him from under the modern straw hat, was a face washed in with sunshine in the manner of the great master.

He commanded his courage. 'Tell me who you are? I know you quite well.'

Again she laughed deliciously: her laughter itself seemed but another form of sunshine: it rippled and danced like floods of warm light upon a summer stream.

It went to Gervase's head: his heart thumped: he had never felt so entirely idiotic in his life.

'Are you going to catch a train?'

The whole thing had happened in a flash, and in a flash her next words brought him back to the present.

'Good Heavens, yes! I *am* going to catch a train'—he looked at his watch; 'and I shall have to catch it without knowing who you are if you

won't tell me,' he added. 'I'm afraid the train won't wait.'

'Will you be away for long?'

'For two months.'

'What a long visit! Where are you going?'

'To Oxford.'

'Oxford! Oh, are you going to a College at Oxford?'

Gervase laughed. 'Yes; but it sounds so odd, put like that. Do you know'—he stared at her hard—'I think it's your voice—but—I'm beginning to remember!'

'Oh, *are* you!—just as you are going away!' Then, with a quick imperative gesture, as though it were natural to her to command, the girl stood up in the cart.

'Will you take my box home to mother, Mr. Thoms, and then drive back again to the station for me? I am going to see Master Gerv—Mr. Alleyne off to Oxford.'

The man demurred. 'That'll be the price of two journeys for the cart, miss.'

'Of course. I don't mind the price of two journeys for the cart,' she replied disdainfully. 'Good gracious, if you hadn't seen an old friend for years and years—— Here, Gervase, you've got to take me in!'

Without waiting for his answer she jumped lightly from Thoms' cart on to the ground, and it was obvious in that quick movement that the badly-made cashmere dress she wore, clothed a figure of more than common beauty.

'Here, take me in, Gervase!' With another

little laugh—she was always laughing—the girl put her foot on to the step of the dog-cart and seated herself beside him. She drew the rug over her knees.

'Good-bye, Mr. Thoms.' She threw her dismissal back to the man, who still waited. 'Go on,' she said to Gervase, 'now we can talk!'

'Stop,' cried the boy, who had been dazed by the rapidity of events; 'you won't want Thoms' cart a second time. You can go back in this when I am gone.'

'That's much better,' answered his companion demurely.—'Do you hear, Mr. Thoms?—only one journey after all!'

'Yes, miss,' replied the man, 'I hear! all right.'

Again she settled herself comfortably in her seat. 'Do go on now—talking, I mean; I don't believe you are half as glad to see me as I am to see you!'

Gervase protested fiercely.

'I am most awfully glad, and I think it's most awfully jolly of you to drive like this to the station with me. I do know who you are, too. I've remembered quite now—only what I've remembered doesn't seem possible, and it's all too queer for words!'

'What's too queer?'

'That you are little Kate.'

The girl clapped her hands. 'There, I haven't had to tell you after all!—but oh, how funny that you should forget me! Am I so different?'

'As different as—as——'

'Well, of course that *is* awfully different. But

it's only six years, after all. You are different too.'

'Am I? How different?'

'Quite as different as—as—! What a shame to tease you! Well, you are frightfully different, but you have still got the same eyes—one always recognises people by the eyes, don't you know that? But you have grown big, and wide, and strong, and brown, and—' she looked at him again quite frankly, and once more her laugh rippled round her words—'very good-looking, and jolly.'

Against his will the young man dropped his eyes. He hated doing such a silly thing; but as a rule people did not talk to him like this, and he did not know how to reply. Still, he was not really shy with Kate Souls in the sense of being embarrassed; indeed, she was the first woman with whom he had not felt shy—and that he thought was the oddest thing about her. He merely felt now as though he were sitting in the sun, extraordinarily warm and happy. He wanted to laugh for nothing at all. Indeed he did laugh—they both laughed for nothing at all; and with every laugh their general contentment increased. He had forgotten all about Oxford until he realised suddenly that there was only another quarter of a mile to the station. And then—O misery! Why should so beatific a drive ever come to an end? Then he felt that he must talk.

'You are different in lots of ways,' he said.

'Different from what I was, do you mean?—or different from other people?'

'Both. At least you are not really different

from what you were: you are the same, only lots more so. But you are ever so different from other people—girls, I mean.'

'Am I? How?'

'You don't chaff one or criticise.'

'How do you know?'

'I feel it.'

'I only—appreciate?'

'Now you are trying to score off me. But I don't mind. I can't think how you learnt it.'

'Learnt what?'

'To be so frank, and to say what you mean and not to mind. I always find that so difficult.'

'You haven't been in a convent for six years!'

'But—I thought they taught you just the opposite in convents!'

'They do. They teach you meekness, and holy custody of the eyes. But I wouldn't be taught. I was a rebel from the first. I hate rules, and laws, and petty footling little sins. And oh, blessed Mary and all the Saints, how I hate convents!'

Gervase was a little startled at her vehemence—not much, for the sunshine had got into his blood and he still basked in it. 'But how did you avoid it—the atmosphere, I mean?'

'I used to make up my mind every day that, whatever happened to me, I wouldn't be religious. I used to say at my prayers, "O God—if there is a God—save me from being religious, because I just can't stand it!" Then I had a friend, Mabel Pike—an American girl whose people lived

in a flat in Paris. I used to stay with her sometimes in the holidays. The Pikes hated what you call "the atmosphere," and Mabel only went to the convent because she was poor, like me. Her father was an artist. I didn't really have a bad time there, you know. Some of the girls liked me, and I liked some of the nuns.'

'Poor nuns!'

'Oh, I wasn't really bad to them, you know. I wouldn't have hurt their darling old feelings for the whole world. I used to make them bouquets sometimes.'

'Bouquets!'

'Spiritual bouquets. You make a bouquet up of little paper flowers, and round the stalk of every flower you roll a bit of paper, with one good deed that you have done for the sake of your particular nun, written down upon it; it must be something unselfish or difficult, you know—saying an extra rosary, or getting up early in the morning, or giving money in charity, things of that sort. When you have made your bouquet you give it to your nun, and then she loves you and prays for you, especially.'

'Are you a Roman Catholic?' exclaimed Gervase.

The girl shook her head.

'Oh no, mother said that I was never to forget that I was a Protestant. She did not want me to go to mass, or keep novenas, and things of that sort. But I always did, you know, and I think it is just as silly to be a Protestant as a Catholic. I am not anything.'

A sudden chill struck Gervase to the bone, and all the light died out of his face.

'Do you mean to say that you are—nothing?' he said gravely. It seemed incredible to him that she should talk like this.

The girl looked up in astonishment at his change of tone.

'Yes, but——'

He put out his hand as though to ward off a blow. 'Don't—don't tell me! I can't think about it; I daren't. It is only that you don't understand. You will, some day. I will make you, and you shall get to know Mark Hassall. Kate, these things mean an awful lot to me—an awful lot.'

The pained surprise upon the girl's face died away, swept by a quick tide of red.

'Oh, forgive me! Forgive me!' she cried in a sudden rush of remorse. 'What a perfect idiot I am; I talk stupidly sometimes—of course I know that some people—forgive me! I'm—' In her penitence she laid the palm of her hand down upon the back of that of the young man; the action was that of a little child, innocent and unpremeditated. 'I'm so sorry, Gervase.'

He felt the light touch like a sudden sting; something mounted to his brain; he could not think clearly of what she was saying.

'You won't say you forgive me!' In her eagerness she grasped his hand.

'Oh, don't!' the boy wrenched himself away. He was blushing furiously now. 'There is nothing to forgive, you don't understand. You

will, some day. Only—only it came as a surprise, and I had to tell you what it meant to me.'

'And now you are not angry with me any more?'

'Kate!' Gervase laughed, and in this laughter the cloud between them cleared; it had passed in a moment of time, but its passing had force to draw them still nearer together; the sun shone out again afterwards—more glorious, more blinding than before. 'Kate, I'll—I'll punch you if you are so absurd!'

Satisfied, she fell back upon her early mood. 'I know, you have punched me often and often, and twisted my arm round to make me scream. I remember! Oh, Gervase, *can't* we play at Bobbies and Thieves?'

'What—now?'

'No, when you come back for your holidays.'

'Vac,' he corrected; 'it sounds better.'

'Vac, then. Can't we play Bobbies and Thieves in the vac, and dress up? Oh, do let us! I will be Miss Kirkwood and you shall be Mr. Money. Was Miss Kirkwood's sovereign ever found, and does Marion Brereton still do her hair in two plaits? Are you as great friends with mother and Miriam as you used to be? Oh, isn't it awful to think that I have put off seeing mother and Miriam for a whole half-hour all because of you! Still, it isn't so long since I saw them.'

'I can't think where I was when you were here before!'

'You were staying with somebody—Jack

Denham. Oh, bother, here is the station, and here is William waiting for the cart!'

The young man jumped down reluctantly.

'Good-bye,' he said, putting out his hand and looking frankly into the girl's eyes. He took an extraordinary pleasure in so doing. All the time he had talked to Kate he had faced her and never looked away. He felt as though in this he held her somehow. How different she was to other girls! How different! He never wanted to look at them; he became embarrassed when they looked at him. Even while he was saying good-bye he was absorbed in the surprise and pleasure of having met a human creature with whom he could talk so easily: he did not realise that it was good-bye; he had even forgotten the shock of their sudden disagreement.

'How horrid it is that you are going away,' said Kate.

The fact reached him and brought a pang.

'Yes, *horrid*!' He took two steps forward and then hurried back. 'Will you write to me sometimes?' The words came eagerly, in a whisper.

'You never wanted to hear before.'

'I do now—awfully!'

'For how long have you wanted?'

'For half an hour. Oh do—do!'

'All right,' the girl nodded. 'But, go! There is your train.'

'Brute!' he said savagely, and ran. 'The train, I mean!' he called back over his shoulder.

He flung himself into a carriage: bags and

rugs were pitched in after him: the engine screamed—Thump, Thump, the thing was off—rushing, and puffing, and screeching, through a quiet inoffensive country, that only stared at it aghast.

Gervase leant out of the window to get another view of the dog-cart, for just beyond the station the line swept back and crossed the King's Stratton road. Kate was there, waiting for the train. She had tied a pocket-handkerchief on to her umbrella, and now waved it wildly.

When he had done gesticulating at her, he sat back in the carriage; and the old bogey that had attacked him at the beginning of his journey dropped down upon him, chillier and more bogeyish than ever before. He reconsidered the events of his drive; but the glamour gradually faded from it, leaving nothing but Kate's careless words that had so shocked him. He felt profoundly and inexplicably wretched.

BOOK II

YOUTH

CHAPTER IX

OXFORD

GERVASE had taken a leap, the distance of which he did not realise until he was safely landed on the other side, with his undergraduate years behind him. Oxford meant a great awakening. Coming as he did, not from the public life of a great school, but from a boyhood so secluded that he could hardly speak of it,—for to talk of King's Stratton would be to lay bare the secret places of his soul,—he found that, in this new world, the past was not against him. He was no longer a shivering schoolboy, afraid of every eye that happened to glance in his direction, but a young man, well able to hold his own in a world of other young men with similar tastes and opinions.

In his Oxford tutor, to his amusement and also to his satisfaction—for it evidenced a penetrating eye—he discovered a curious contrast to Mark Hassall, a contrast as it were in sameness. This man was in orders, no less unclerical as a priest than Mark Hassall was clerical as a layman; a scholar shrewd and witty, who brought a sceptic's fastidiousness to the service of his faith. Through

him Gervase learnt to prove all things, as through Mark Hassall he had learned to hold fast that which was good.

But his first year brought him, before all else, a new revelation of himself; for when he entered he did not know what his tastes or his opinions on a variety of subjects really were. Some serious men called on him, and some of Jack Denham's friends, who were the reverse of serious, called also: but although he liked them superficially, and later went so far as to subscribe to the Beagles, he did not join the sporting clubs, and, after a term or two, saw less of Denham and the sporting set generally. Jack himself had become a member of the Bullingdon, and wore its blue and white ribbon with joyful self-consciousness. In looking back over this period, Gervase found that, although his friendship with Denham remained, the romance of it had evaporated; and, all things considered, this was not extraordinary. Jack went down at the end of his third year, much as he had come up—jolly, irresponsible, and well dressed; but touched scarcely at all by the spirit of Oxford or its intellectual atmosphere. Gervase, on the other hand, was, it seemed, made anew. His lasting friendships, he discovered, were those of his first year. The little gang of the 'freshers' who came up with him were quick to fraternise: they had called upon each other as soon as possible, and sat together in Hall and Chapel. Among them was Lord Wareham, the eldest son of the Earl of Corfe, a truculent Whig peer, who supported, with a good deal of mistrust, the new liberalism. The

qualities of his father, however, did not seem to have descended upon Wareham, for he was a quiet, modest youth, who derived his chief amusement from the long walks and excursions he took with Gervase. A common knowledge of trees and birds linked the two together. Gervase described his solitary, beautiful King's Stratton, and Wareham talked of his home, Wick Abbey, and its famous ruins.

During their first year, the great event for both Wareham and Gervase was their election to the Thirty Club, a college debating society, to which a few chosen freshmen of each year were admitted. The members met in each other's rooms and discussed the great problems of life, crystallised as it were into the form of resolutions. It might be 'That this House would rather be cremated than buried,' or 'That this House prefers Tolstoy to Tourgenieff,' or 'That this House deplores the existence of a hereditary aristocracy.' With much form and solemnity, and as much knowledge as could conveniently be gathered, Honourable Members would discuss such questions until bedtime. The Gladstone Club, later on, brought them into a wider atmosphere: it contained members of other colleges, and endeavoured to unite the pick of young Oxford liberals. Here the debates were more serious in tone, better informed, and less irresponsible.

But long before his election to the Gladstone, Gervase had learnt many new things about life. To his astonishment he found himself, even during his first year, exceedingly popular with a certain set

at Oxford. Could he have known it, the thing was simple enough; a good-looking lad, possessing not only the means to gratify his tastes, but strong individuality and personal magnetism, could hardly lack a following, even if at the same time envy called him up some enemies. But Gervase did not realise this any more than did the ugly duckling when the period of his ugliness was passed away. He had had it imprinted upon his very soul that he was bad at games, and 'queer,' and now this enormous change in the attitude of his fellow-creatures caused him some bewilderment: but he kept his head. His religious life was undergoing a change also, a change for which the acknowledged centres of religious activity could not be held responsible; it was rather the *genius loci* of Oxford itself that laid hands upon him. The old grey buildings began to hold for him a soul—the soul of the past, imprisoned there by human lives wrought into the very stone. Hitherto he had felt the Invisible in seas and skies, and cloudy mysterious distances, in plants and insects, and the green things of the earth; and God and himself were all that mattered to him. Now he began to realise this same spirit in man, and in the works of man, in the steady stream of life that flowed for ever through humanity. The vast company of Christians, dead and alive, seemed here to be at one—a great communion of the saints. The massive piers in the Cathedral, with their strangely-carved capitals, linked together many centuries of men, from the Norman kings to the quick flitting generations of undergraduates. Through all this he began to

grasp the meaning of time and evolution. The stream of life was one. These buildings were a symbol of the past—the human past, full of joys and sorrows, great delights and unimagined agonies. Through the warm immediate present it flowed away, on and on into the mist of the unknown.

This thought came to him as a revelation, a revelation of man, and God in man. As he sat in the Cathedral on Sunday mornings, the gracious beauty of the Burne-Jones windows, with their crowded incidents, and even the Jacobean Jonah under his green gourd, preached the same lesson—where man is, there God is also. This reflection brought him to a new view of the world; he began to realise the solidarity of the human family, and the responsibility of the individual to society. Every heart-beat, every breath he drew, determined in some degree the direction of this stream of life: this thought added to his responsibility; it possessed him; by the side of it his personal salvation seemed a little thing. God in man, past, present, and to come—so he read the lesson of the Incarnation.

And this faith forced him now to be interested in social questions: it brought him up against the tragic meaning of statistics.

That fifty-five per cent of the children of the working classes die before they are five years old, or that, there are in London one hundred and fifty thousand families living in one-roomed homes, seemed to him a horror scarcely to be borne. He had perhaps heard of these things before, but now the facts left him no peace; they noised in his ears

until he was forced to speak of them to others. He debated these subjects at the Thirty Club, and later on, in his third year, before the larger and more alien audience at the Union. He was great at perorations and the coining of phrases. Some of these lived on, even after he had gone down. *Compromise is a rock which splits the honour of Englishmen.* '*Business is business*' *and* '*Honesty is the best policy*': *these Proverbs are Satan's counterfeit of truth and written in the Bible of Hell.* Thus he delivered himself upon the modern commercial spirit.

Gervase saw the world at this time drawn large and very distinct in colour. There was nothing niggardly in his outlook. His mind was growing, first in one direction, and then in the other; but he was no older than his years. As time went on many things that had seemed at first to be essential parts of his nature dropped away, while others, thanks to Mark Hassall's early training, strengthened in maturity.

In his fourth year Gervase Alleyne was President of the Union.

During the long vacation which followed his last term, spent with Mark Hassall in Switzerland, Gervase heard, to Hassall's surprise and disappointment, and his own transient discomfiture, that he had only taken a second. But he soon recovered his equanimity. 'Dear old Padre,' said he reassuringly, 'I know it is stupid to have got a second—a clever man takes a first, and a genius takes a first or a third, and I'm so wretchedly

commonplace. But I would not have had it at the price of all the rest.'

'The rest?' queried Hassall, with a grunt of dissatisfaction.

'Yes, the other things—the things that matter—that count more. If I had spent all my time in grinding, I should have lost them!'

The grunt changed to a groan. 'Oh, the infallibility of youth! Upon my soul, I wish you'd been ploughed!'

And yet Gervase was right, and in spite of his irritation, Mark Hassall knew quite well that what the lad had given and taken at Oxford could never have been tested by the schools.

'Rum chap—Gervase!' said Denham afterwards, in talking to Mrs. Savile; 'I thought that he was bound to get a first! Rum place Oxford too—it's such a lot of places. I expect if I wrote my reminiscences of Alma Mater they would not touch his on a single point. I tell you what it is, Alma Mater's jolly like Cæsar's wife—"all things to all men"!'

'*Was* Cæsar's wife all things to all men?' queried Mrs. Savile.

Denham looked blank. 'Wasn't she? Some one was! If it wasn't her, who was it?'

CHAPTER X

THE LEAVEN WORKS

GERVASE returned to King's Stratton red-hot for work. The place had to be set to rights. After that—he was uncertain, but his aspiration was set towards Westminster.

'Parliament! Oh Gervase, not yet!' Lady Brereton suggested that he was young for a legislator. But he responded grandly—'Pitt was a Prime Minister at twenty-three, and well'—he straightened his collar,—'there are things to be put through!' At which she gave herself to laughter.

'Dear Gervase, you are nothing more than an ordinary boy, after all. I was afraid at first that you would develop into something quite different.'

But his ambition held him. He dreamt of politics, politics regarded from an ideal standpoint, equity made fact, liberty framed in an act of parliament that might some day bear his name. He was wild for social justice. Housing of the Poor, Wages Boards, Regulation of Dangerous Trades,

these words were the ciphers that held the fire and poetry of his youth—the poetry of blue-books.

'What do I find in a blue-book?' said his diary, written during his last year at Oxford. 'Mistakes, failures, agony unspeakable, death, and wasted lives. Hood's *Song of the Shirt* is written once again in statistics. The meaning of that song is sterner and more terrible when *they* write it, as fact is sterner and more terrible than fancy. We have turned this traffic in human lives into an organisation now—the Sweating System—and into it we fling men, women, and little children, to give them a chance to prolong the existences we else would rob them of. And yet we eat, and drink, and laugh, and sleep, and pray, as though there were no such horror in the world.'

Thus far had he progressed from the time when he emerged from a vision of angels to go to Oxford. But the ancient dream of the past would never be forgotten: he was what he was because of it, and saw the more clearly.

'*As often as I have been among men, I have returned home less a man than I was before.*' Every moment of the last three years had given the lie to that old phrase, once copied so carefully into his diary. He had never felt so much a man as now. The diary itself was a different thing. Some day and for a time he would return into the ideal world, and then all the hurry and noise and babel of voices would sound merely like the rushing of many waters under the quiet mountains of eternal truth. But this time had not yet come.

He was not ripe for it : the blood in his veins was too hot.

He found King's Stratton much as he had left it, comfortable, sleepy, and disinclined to move. The villagers blinked at his proposals for their improvement, and wondered what would happen next. In his near neighbours he found no great change either. Lady Brereton seemed younger than ever, beside the precocious wisdom of Peter, who talked epigrams from his sofa. Mrs. Savile was like a pretty humming-bird ; and Emma Souls was Emma Souls and nothing more, although perhaps it is hardly fair thus to describe a lady with a Past,—a Past, too, that during the last three years had developed wonderfully. Kate, from whom Gervase had parted so romantically on the day he went up to Oxford, was studying art in Paris. Life had swept in and divided her from the undergraduate. Her convent days over, she had gone to live with her friend Mabel Pike.

With his fresh interests, his friends, and above all, his undreamt-of social success, the boy had no time to think of old days at King's Stratton, or to dwell upon future ones, in which Kate, or even a Kate of some sort, might have borne a part. The atmosphere he lived in was inimical to such imaginings : they were turned aside by the rush of new adventure. As for falling seriously in love, he now rather dreaded it than otherwise ; and was quite ready to postpone meeting with that 'not impossible she' he had once so much desired. Indeed he hoped naively that such a thing might

not happen to him for a long time yet. A good deal of the romance contingent upon the springtime of life was borne away by friendships ; the rest was spent upon an ideal.

He and Kate corresponded now and again : she was working with Mabel Pike in Fleurier's studio, and her letters were all concerned with art and artists. 'They smell of paint!' said Jack Denham, turning up his nose, when Gervase once read him a short extract. It was true ; they breathed the atmosphere of the art student, the art student who would shortly blossom out into the successful artist. There was no doubt at all as to Kate's future : Fleurier pinned his reputation as a critic upon his prophecies. Her first picture that had been exhibited in the Salon was already sold. Lord Wareham had bought it, chiefly through Gervase's influence, it is true, but of that Kate was happily unaware.

She wrote to tell Miriam what had happened.

DARLING MIRRY—My Salon picture has been bought for a hundred pounds. Think of it—the first picture I have ever exhibited! The news only came yesterday, and I was wild with joy, as you may imagine. I laughed and cried both at once. An Englishman has bought it—Lord Wareham, a friend of Gervase's. He came to tea in the afternoon, and we had a lot of studio people. Georges (you know Georges Samarou, I have told you about him) bought me a wreath of red roses, and I wore them on my head, and forgot all about everything. Lord Wareham must have thought me mad, but I was simply bursting with excitement. I don't know what I said or how I looked. When he arrived I could only catch

hold of his hand and gasp. I wanted to kiss him, I was so grateful. He was frightfully amused at our taking on so, for everybody else was just as bad.

'I had no idea that it was such a delightful thing to buy a picture!' he said.

'Not half so delightful as to sell one,' I answered. 'It's like—oh, I can't tell you—swallowing the moon and finding it *delicious*.'

'But other people sell pictures every day!' he said, looking puzzled.

'*No!*' I answered—very emphatically, for I meant it. 'They only sell one picture for the first time, once in their lives.'

'It's like falling in love,' said he.

'Perhaps,' I answered, 'but much, *much* more wonderful and heavenly, because you may fall in love again, but you can never, never, never sell a first picture for the first time, twice over.'

He laughed and I felt his eyes following me round the studio. I thought suddenly I should like to see more of him, and then I remembered Work. I should never be able to work with a young man—and a lord into the bargain—hanging round. So when he asked me if he might come again I shook my head—oh Mirry, you don't know what it cost me! I wouldn't even go to a tea-party in his flat. I said 'not at present, thank you,' and laughed, but I do believe I had the tears in my eyes when I said it. Anyhow I cried inwardly. Then I remembered my glorious darling of an Ariadne who is coming alive on my canvas, stroke by stroke, touch by touch, and I didn't mind any more. I would rather paint a picture than go to tea with a thousand Lord Warehams. I know I see something that other people don't see. A great picture is a picture of the model, a picture of yourself, and a vision thrown in between the two. All the great painters had a vision, and thank God, I have one! A poky, stuffy, little vision if you like, but still a vision—a bit of the true sight, the

real thing, and it makes me dizzy. I want to paint it—and die.

Gervase was glad to hear that Kate had sold her picture, but beyond that, he was only vaguely interested : the world in which she lived was one far removed from his own, which he now found entirely satisfying.

CHAPTER XI

LADY SARAH BEVERLEY

In the education of Gervase his friend Lord Wareham had, although indirectly, played a larger part than either of them knew; for during the following summer Gervase was invited to stay at Wick Abbey. There he met several brilliant and distinguished persons, whom he regarded with eyes becomingly fearful, not because they made up a part of what is usually termed 'Society' (a thing of which Gervase had as yet no experience), but because their names at least stood for certain English qualities which he had been brought up to reverence and admire. But life at Wick was not difficult; it was freer even than at Oxford—and Oxford to him had meant the bursting of prison bars. At Wick Gervase found himself completely. Conversation became an easier thing to him there than silence, and indeed names and topics, and even secrets, were bandied about with what seemed to our young man to be a most surprising openness. But everybody was kind to him, and people who had sons at the House—even

a few others, for his career at Oxford had not passed unnoticed—knew his name. Some day, he was told significantly, he would be useful to his Party! Naturally a modest person, he returned from that visit a little dizzy.

And so once more his horizon lifted.

The mere setting of life at Wick was more elaborate than anything he had ever known before; gorgeous, full of light, and colour, and charm, it absorbed his senses. His impression of the Wick dining-room on the first night of his arrival remained with him: roses and gold plate shone upon a polished table, under the delicate lustre of candle-light; silks like roses, diamonds, gleaming shoulders, and laughing faces, surrounded it; and in the dim distance of the huge room an occasional servant out of the many shadowy figures with white liveries and powdered heads flashed into sight. But all this profusion of detail, delightful to him chiefly by its novelty, was, as he was aware, the mere setting, on which life might scintillate the more brilliantly. It had, however, this effect upon him. King's Stratton on his return seemed to be small and stuffy, and the King's Stratton people small and stuffy too, more interested in the accidents of wealth than in the essentials of character. Even Lady Brereton had questioned him about Wick.

'Tell me, Gervase, what does a groom of the chambers do? I never know.'

'I don't either,' replied the boy vaguely; 'I didn't notice. Oh—' he paused, 'Yes, I do. He fills up the inkstands and sharpens all the pencils.'

'Sharpens——'

He interrupted, 'Oh Lady Brereton, there was a lady there at Wick—whom you would have have liked!' Then he grew silent.

'Would I?' Lady Brereton smiled. 'Who was she?'

'Lady Sarah Beverley. Her husband——'

'Oh, she is married!'

'She is a widow, but quite young, only twenty-seven, and lovely, lovely—like Romney's Lady Hamilton.' Again the boy was silent. His mind had rushed back to a moonlight night at Wick when during a long talk, the last of many long talks, he had poured out his soul to this enchantress. He had not drawn the veil from the inner sanctuary,—the holy of holies where the cloud still rested between the cherubim,—but he had talked of life at Oxford, hopes, ambitions and enthusiasms, until all was said and not another word remained.

The lady had listened: she always listened quietly, fearful of checking, even by a movement, his supreme naturalness. The souls of men interested her, and to-night—everlasting woman that she was—she had grown curious about Gervase. She questioned him on other matters, but she questioned him more by implication than by direct appeal, and his answers brought into her fair face a shadow of surprise. The reserve of a young man is more impenetrable than that of a maiden; only to a woman, and that a woman with whom, consciously or unconsciously, he is more than half in love, does he break through it.

'You will make some girl very happy one day, my dear.'

It was with a quick tenderness that she turned upon this lad, only five years her junior, but from whom she was divided by æons of experience. He did not reply, and for a moment, Lady Sarah Beverley found it hard to resist the temptation of adding yet another achievement to her list of conquests. But, be it laid to her credit—although Lady Sarah's credit account with Society was desperately overdrawn—she did resist it; and love, as far as she was concerned, remained still a closed book for Gervase Alleyne.

'I expect I'm a fool,' she said to herself on the way back. 'Some one else even less worthy will probably teach him what I could have taught him—at least delightfully. If only I could be sure that it *would* be the nice girl! And the worst of it is I'm sure, or nearly sure, it won't. He is too —too good for the nice girl to understand, yet. If only we saw the results of all our sacrifices, how they might make us shudder. I know I'm a fool! And such a night! "*The moon shines bright:—in such a night as this*"—'

So the most beautiful woman in the world, to Gervase's present thinking, reflected, as she ran lightly up the steps into the lighted drawing-room. She sang as she went—

'"*Gardez-vous d'être sévère*
Quand on vous parle d'amour.
Un plaisir—"

'But he did not talk of love, that's just it; and

he will never know now all he would have talked of, if I had only let him. That is my secret.'

That night Gervase dreamt of his mother, mixed up with and indistinguishable from Lady Sarah Beverley.

CHAPTER XII

THE MISSIONARY

JACK DENHAM, who was now reading for the bar, practically lived at King's Stratton. He said that he had an affection for it. Being without honour in his own household, he felt himself to be appreciated here, and returned to the neighbourhood whenever he got an opportunity. The Souls family were responsible for a good deal of this affection. 'Too responsible!' Mrs. Savile said, nodding her head significantly.

But Lady Brereton, to whom the remark was addressed, refused to agree with it. If Millicent thought that Miriam Souls had anything to do with it, she was mistaken. Miriam was a nice girl and wonderfully improved of late.

'She seems more diffident, far less sure of herself than she used to be. I quite like having her up here. And why shouldn't she marry Mr. Denham if she wants to?' concluded Lady Brereton, inconsequently.

'Or if *he* wants to!' replied Mrs. Savile; 'there isn't much doubt about her! She is one of those girls whose whole appearance shouts when

she falls in love. I walked across the fields behind the pair of them the other day. It was rather late, and they didn't think that anybody was about. They were strolling along most cheerfully hand in hand. What do you say to that?'

'I haven't anything to say to it. It probably means that they are engaged. Why shouldn't they be? Mr. Denham is a very pleasant young man.'

'Very pleasant. But is he in a position to marry?'

'I can't tell you. I only know that he is going up for his examination next week.'

'Then,' replied Mrs. Savile, sagely, 'we shan't see much more of him for some time. Things have got to a hand-in-hand pass, and that means he'll have to go back, or go on. He won't go on. You'll see!'

Lady Brereton looked troubled. 'Poor girl! I do hope he hasn't been playing with her, Millicent. That sort of disappointment is very painful to a girl. She can't complain or show her unhappiness; she just has to bear it in silence.'

'H'm,' said Mrs. Savile, pursing up her lips, 'there won't be much silence about your Miss Miriam.'

Millicent Savile's prophecy was justified. After the examination Jack Denham kept away from King's Stratton, conspicuously so, people said.

Emma Souls watched Miriam furtively, for, however much this mother and daughter might

annoy one another, there were few secrets between them. 'Mirry always blabs,' little Kate had once said in scorn. And it was true. Miriam Souls had not enough strength of character to keep even her own counsel. At this juncture she was as loudly ostentatious in her grief as she had been in her happiness; she pushed them both to an extremity. During the first few weeks of Denham's absence every tone of her voice, and movement of her body, made her proclamation. Never particularly trim, she became untidy in her dress; there was now, of mornings, a gaping void between her bodice and her skirt; her shoes were trodden at the heel; and her hair was pinned up in a rough mass.

Sometimes, later in the day, she straightened herself up, and went over to Weybourne, for Lady Brereton had always been kind to her; but more often than not she lay on the sofa, staring out of the window, too apathetic to move.

One day Gervase Alleyne, who had come down to the cottage, bearing some parochial message from Mr. Money to Emma Souls, found her, and wondered what could have happened to bring about such a change. Miriam had just been crying, and her face was blotched and swollen; she looked almost plain. Hitherto he had not noticed the alteration in her which had attracted the attention of her neighbours, and now it came upon him with a kind of shock. Even if they had shared no common childhood, ordinary human pity would have been touched at the sight of such a sudden letting go of the business of life.

Again he wondered what had happened. He wished he could say something to show that he sympathised with her. Only four words were necessary, 'What is the matter?' and then four more, 'Can I help you?' But his tongue was doubly tied, first by his age and then by his sex. He could not speak the phrase. Absent-mindedly he talked commonplaces, until Miriam herself, as though beset by thoughts that were too importunate to be borne, burst out—

'What do you do when you get the blues—devils I mean? What did Mr. Hassall—the little Pope I always called him—tell you to do?'

The young man, in spite of his many conversations with Mark Hassall upon the subject, was silent.

'I don't quite know,' he said at last turning a shade redder. The phrase was not strictly true. Gervase did know quite well, but he did not know how to translate Hassall's teaching into anything that would not sound unendurably pedantic.

'He always said that there must be—something,' he faltered at last; 'something to—to cause that state of mind.'

'To cause it! Why, of course there is. It doesn't come by itself.'

'That is not what I mean. Something wrong in oneself—something to be wiped out—done for. Oh, great Scot, I feel such a ghastly prig!'

The girl leant back in her chair considering the idea.

'Of course there is something,' she said, as though she had suddenly arrived at a conclusion. 'That's just it. It's a nasty feeling, isn't it? as

if you had got a sword through you that turns now and again, just to show that it's there. But it is there, and I can't get rid of it. What am I to do?' She laughed. 'It's silly my asking you these things, because I can't explain. There, I'm sorry! Go back home and forget all about it. As a matter of fact I feel a bit better, now that I have talked—not so much weighed down, I mean.'

It was time to go, and yet Gervase hesitated. For the first time in his life he found himself thrust into the position of a preceptor, and preceptor to a young woman; not that he gave conscious thought to that fact, but notwithstanding, it added to his instinctive awkwardness in the juncture.

Absolutely he could find nothing more to say. He pressed Miriam's hand, and went out feeling that he had failed. He was ashamed of himself; his conscience pricked him that he had not been true to his creed or to his Master. But why, why was he hampered with this grotesque shyness? His impulse, fostered by his education and the approval of his superiors, was always to hide his faith rather than to expound it. Here obviously was a fellow-creature in distress; and, like the Priest and Levite in the parable, he had passed by on the other side. He had not really wanted to know anything about Miriam's trouble; indeed, although he scarcely owned to it, he was glad that she had kept her secret. So he accused himself. And yet it was difficult to know what he could have said. There was in this girl nothing to

begin upon, it seemed, no foundation of faith or principle; she had no rule of life to which he might appeal; she had never known the meaning of such words as discipline or sacrifice. He thought of calling upon Mr. Money as he went home and consulting him, but that impulse did not survive reflection. Mr. Money's religion was too robust to be of much use to one who was so sick spiritually as the girl to whom Gervase had been talking. The Rector of King's Stratton, in his uncomprehending optimism, would drive her into even darker depths. A shake of the hand from Mr. Money always managed to convey the notion that he knew all there was to be known about life, and death, and eternity; and anything else there might be beyond his sphere would not be worth knowing; he was ready to convert anybody at a moment's notice, and as for those who did not want to be converted, well, so much the worse for them.

The young man felt all this vaguely, and scarcely knowing why he did so, decided that the soul of Miriam should be his business. The girl had appealed to him, and, much as he might desire to, he would not shirk the responsibility. For one moment he wished that he had been in orders, to deal as a priest the more easily with her. Then, there would be nothing absurd in the following of his vocation; then, there would be no need to approach it with—horrible thought—blushes! And he blushed to blush. But that idea soon passed him, for the world outside the Church was, he speculated, even more in need of

consecrated lives than the priesthood itself. This thought, however, although present, as it were, in solution, was not resolved into actual words; that bugbear, the stuffed figure of the 'prig,' which is responsible for the death of so many fine ideals and heroic aspirations, forbade it. 'Smack his silly head and tell him to dry up!' the echo of this lesson still remained.

For the rest of the day the thought of Miriam followed him. He hunted out some books that he imagined might be useful to her, and at night he prayed for her in the oratory, remaining long upon his knees.

He attacked the problem of the girl's unhappiness from every side, but found always the same answer. If the human soul desires only God and the will of God, then every care and trouble that comes to it sinks into insignificance. Gervase had, when a child, discovered this, over his solitary games in the wood-walk: it was the one thing that held life in him during the misery of Eton—'Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him.' Afterwards at Oxford it kept his days sweet and sane; it protected him from the vertigo incident upon dazzling popularity; it held his head straight upon his shoulders, for he measured every event that befell him by its greatness.

If only Miriam could be brought to understand it. But how? That was the difficulty. The girl was in rebellion against the limitations of her life; once let her submit to them and accept her part in the universe as she found it, all would be well—more than well, existence would be irradiated.

That was the great secret, wrested from life only through suffering, to lose the personal self, the will, in God the supreme Good. That was to be happy.

Such was the result of Gervase's meditation. To-morrow he would go and expound it to Miriam. He would conquer his stupid shyness and then surely he would be able to make her see what he saw so clearly. Pondering these things he fell asleep.

Next morning he was up betimes. A 'call' had come to him. In response to it he went down to the Souls' cottage, where he found Emma, as usual, very glad to see him.

'Mirry is a bit better to-day,' she told him confidentially; 'she put up her hair in pins last night.'

She opened the drawing-room door and ushered him in. Jack Denham had been free of the whole house, and came and went as he pleased; but there was always a certain etiquette observed towards Gervase.

He heard Emma talking overhead. 'You go on down, Mirry, and I'll see to the beds this morning! And do look a bit brisker! You haven't washed much either, there's quite a water-mark round your throat. Do try and be a little particular. It's so low to have a water-mark like that! Just you take the flannel and give it a scrub underneath the chin, there's a dear!' The rest of her talk was lost on Gervase. He pushed his fingers into his ears so as not to hear, although

the words 'attentive' and 'rather struck' forced themselves upon him. He walked about the room looking at the ornaments and furniture, and at last Emma stopped talking.

The drawing-room expressed emphatically the mind of the Souls' family—pleasant, sentimental, mildly humorous, and somewhat untidy. There were many pictures of happy lovers, and a great deal of art muslin ; the chimney-piece was draped in it, and it hung over the door. Japanese spiders, scorpions, and green cotton-wool frogs were placed upon these draperies in amusing juxtaposition. There were simple jokes of all kinds in Mrs. Souls' drawing-room : small pug-dogs were chased by china cats, large lobsters hung by their claws from pink lampshades, plush monkeys disported themselves in a variety of attitudes. The more strenuous side of life was displayed by several signed photographs of actresses in plated-silver frames that were somewhat the worse for wear. 'Yours till the curtain' seemed to be a favourite inscription ; it occurred twice. Gervase guessed that Jack Denham had helped to procure the pictures of these ladies.

He felt oppressed somehow by the atmosphere of the place ; among things that stood for ideas so futile, it would be hard to press home his gospel of reality. He was glad when Miriam opened the door.

'It's awfully good of you to trouble your head about me,' she said in reply to his questions. She was obviously better. She seated herself and pushed up a pink frilled cushion behind her head.

Her expression showed that she was gratified by the young man's presence. 'I can't imagine what made me burst out like that yesterday. I hope you didn't think me very unladylike!'

With difficulty and much hesitation Gervase propounded his theories. He translated them into the simplest language, but even so they took a long time in the telling.

'What queer ideas,' said Miriam when he had finished. 'Still, I've quite liked listening to it all. It *is* good of you to come down here and talk such a lot! All the same I don't quite understand. You keep saying "give up." What am I to give up?'

'Your worries, whatever they are—all that is keeping you from happiness,' Gervase replied eagerly. He was well launched now upon his subject. 'These things are like a diving-bell that shuts you off in the dark, away from the great sea of gladness that is all around you. I didn't think of that. Some one else did; some one who had a fine character, but who was yet an unhappy man. He knew he was in the diving-bell, but couldn't get out of it. He was imprisoned in himself, as you are.'

'I can't help being what you call imprisoned in myself. I don't understand anything else. The only thing that makes me happy is——'

'The very thing that makes you miserable!' He struck in impetuously, and felt that he had scored. 'Give it up.'

She was obliged to laugh. 'You put it so oddly.'

'I don't, I put it truly. If you run after happiness it will become misery; if you live only for love you will lose it. That is a law of life. He had become dictatorial now, and slighty dogmatic. He spoke in phrases, but the phrases seemed to be like cups, that held the meditations of the previous evening. He did not know that he might have offered them to his Persian cat with as much effect as to Miriam.

'A law of life! How awful!'

'That is how the world is made.'

'What an awful world!'

'It is God's world. To give up the will absolutely to God is to see things differently—to grow new eyes, as it were, to obtain a vision.'

'I don't want new eyes. I want to have a good time.'

'You will never have a good time unless you are prepared for a bad one.'

'It's like a game, it strikes me—all right when you know the dodge!'

'It's a game the saints played at, and earth became heaven.'

'I don't want heaven. I don't want all those fine things. I want to be as happy as I can. I hate the saints. I'd rather die than be a saint; so would Kate; we always said so. It's no good you talking, Gervase, you might talk for ever, and things wouldn't be any better. We had a servant girl here once from the Salvation Army, and she talked just like you, only a little different. You are all alike, you religious people, whatever you call yourselves! "Have your sins been rolled

away?" she used to say, turning up her eyes. "No, that they haven't," I answered, "and I don't want them to be. I like them. The world wouldn't be half so jolly without sins."'

'Then you mustn't complain of the blues.'

'Gracious goodness, I don't complain!' cried the girl inconsequently. 'I didn't want you to come down here and say all this. I never asked you to.' There was a savage note in her voice, as though she were goaded to desperation. 'I'd rather have the bluest blues that were ever made, than be a bright Christian like her. I tell you that much.'

Gervase sat silent; it was very difficult to deal with Miriam. This talk reminded him somewhat of the ''Tisn't'! ''Tis'! ''Tisn't'! of their childish quarrels.

'I expect you think I want a lot more knocking about yet,' she said, sulky and suspicious.

'You will probably get it,' he replied, and then immediately repented the snappishness of the remark. Grieved and humiliated at the failure of his mission he rose to go. How he had messed up the thing, to be sure! He was a poor advocate for God—a man who couldn't even keep his temper! He grew hot at the thought of his presumption.

'I haven't said much to comfort you, I'm afraid.'

'No, indeed,' returned Miriam abruptly; 'you haven't.'

Suddenly her face began to work, her mouth shook and twisted, and her eyes filled with tears. She had used all her strength in fighting his ideas,

and now the reaction had set in. Before everything Miriam was weak, the sport of any emotion that seized her. Possessed of a certain originality and directness in argument, and obstinate with the obstinacy of the irresolute, she had no idea of struggling with, still less of conquering, her mood of the moment.

Now she wanted to weep ; she felt that she had been ill-used, and she wept.

Gervase stood looking at her in horrible dismay. He had never seen a woman cry before. It was all his fault. What could he do ? Miriam sank on to a chair and, burying her face in her arms, sobbed with passion. Gervase watched her heaving shoulders in a kind of terror. What could he do to repair his mischief ? He had been cruel and clumsy in his dealings with her.

'Oh, Mirry, don't cry,' he relapsed into the name of their childhood. 'I am so sorry.' He stood over her, pleading, with his hand on her shoulder.

The girl struggled with her sobs. 'It isn't anything you said—really. Only, I'm so unhappy. I don't know what to do. I can't go on living. It's too awful. It's—it's hell !'

Gervase was caught by the whirlwind of her emotion.

'Poor Mirry ! Dear Mirry ! Can't you tell me what it is all about ? Let us talk about actual facts, happenings, and not about states of soul. Is it—' he choked at the word, loathing the suspicion of gossip that it brought, but the thing had been so talked of that even he had heard it. 'Is it anything to do with Jack ?'

'I hate him,' cried the girl fiercely. 'That's all. I thought I loved him once, but I hate him now like poison. I am all alone and deadly sick of things. At first, when you came, I thought you really wanted to help, but you only preached at me, and talked about God and giving up. It made me feel whipped somehow! You see, I haven't anybody.'

'O Mirry, there is Lady Brereton and Marion.'

'Lady Brereton doesn't know me. She'd think it awful to want to kill yourself because a man had—had jilted you.'

'Was that it?'

'Pretty much. I think I'm a fool to tell you.'

'Not if it is a comfort.'

'Of course it's a comfort. You are my only friend in the place. My God, I don't know how to go through with it. You see, we were engaged in a way, and I thought it was all right. I thought I should be married and get away from this beastly place, and all mother's whinings, and have jewellery, and properly-cut frocks, not makeshifts, that I cobble up for myself. He was so jolly to me always—and now——'

Gervase was a little puzzled. In his high-flown imaginings of love such things had no place, but —well, perhaps it was different for a woman. Miriam was miserable enough, in all conscience.

'Now it is over,' she went on. 'He—he wrote a fortnight ago to say that we weren't really suited to each other, and that I had better break it off myself before he did. I thought of a Breach, but really I have nothing much to go upon,

no letters, I mean. He was always too jolly careful. You can't prove these things without such a lot of fuss. Lady Brereton wouldn't have liked it, and even if I did get a lot of damages I should have lost my friends here.'

Gervase listened to her in silence. At every point her poor second-rate character, full of low ambitions and tawdry disappointments, revealed itself. But misery is not the less acute because it is sordid, indeed it is only then that it becomes irremediable. As for the Christian the sting of death is vanquished, so for the idealist the heart of pain is broken. But Miriam was no idealist, and for her there was no mitigation, no faith, no hope, no love, nothing to stand between her bare soul and her pain. Gervase was filled suddenly with an infinite tenderness, a supreme pity ; at whatever cost to himself or to her he swore that he would pull her out of the deadly slough into which she had fallen.

'Mirry,' he said in a low voice, 'I want to be your friend in all this, your true friend on whom you can rely. I am so glad that you told me ; I wish I could bear it for you. I can only pray for you until you can pray for yourself.'

His hand still rested on the girl's shoulder, and as he bent over her, she, kitten-like and sudden in her movements, turned her head and kissed it. As she did so a charwoman, who had been engaged to help with the housework, suddenly opened the door ; but, seeing what was going on, shut it again abruptly. 'Well, I never did!' she remarked under her breath.

Gervase took his leave, promising to call again on the following morning. His heart was full of an indescribable emotion. He knew now why there was more joy over the one lost sheep than over the ninety and nine just persons.

'Don't let's sit in this stuffy room to-morrow, Mirry,' he said at parting. 'I'll bring you some books and we will go back to the Hall and sit under Miss Kirkwood's ash, and then we can talk. I will try and be of more use to you than I was to-day. I was a prig to-day, and a brute as well—a perfect brute.'

'Thank you, Gervase.' The girl looked up gratefully and wiped her eyes. 'You are very good to me. Perhaps some day I shall see reason in your queer ideas.'

'I hope to God you will,' said the young man; and the phrase, in the way he uttered it, assumed the significance of a prayer.

As he bowed over her hand Gervase looked a very fine gentleman indeed, and for a moment the girl could not help contrasting him with her recreant lover. Jack Denham had always treated her with a courtesy that was, to say the least of it, familiar. Now she watched Gervase as he made his way down the street with a sudden sigh at her heart. Her expression was inscrutable. Then she gave a last quick dab to her eyes, and went about her work for the day. She felt extraordinarily comforted, but—what nonsense he had talked about God!

CHAPTER XIII

THE SOUL OF MIRIAM

In his dealings with Miriam, Gervase felt that past which had been dominated by Mark Hassall revive. Certain aspects of life, not forgotten but for the time obscured, started into colour. He had seen a good deal of her for the last fortnight, in defiance of gossip; he had visited her nearly every day; he had read with her and talked of most things under the heavens. And it seemed as though he had gone back, during that time, to the old quiet life of prayer and contemplation.

And in the girl a great change had taken place. The feminine mind is essentially receptive, and even while Miriam argued and protested against the young man's teaching, she was unconsciously absorbing it. She had the will to agree to a certain superficial part of it; but she had also the obstinacy that is founded upon vanity. She did not wish to give way too easily.

The pair sat daily upon a moss-covered bank in the wood-walk, and if it rained the thick beech roof protected them. Gervase read aloud anything that he thought would meet her case, and

in this way Miriam heard a good deal of Crashaw, and George Herbert, also of Sir Thomas Browne. She sat with her hands idle, or else engaged in making little piles of twigs, and she watched the sunlight drop through the interlacing branches on to the young man's fair head. Sometimes she had not heard a single word he said, but her quick intuition enabled her to disguise the fact: she knew when to keep silence and look intelligent. This new friendship, this semi-religious flirtation, occupied her and gave her something to think about. It was necessary to Miriam's existence that she should be in love, more or less, with somebody—although her whole heart had been given to Jack Denham, and indeed was still his; for if by any possible chance Jack could have made a belated re-appearance, Miriam would have flown to him, in spite of the hatred which she now believed consumed her, without giving Gervase another thought.

Therefore the girl had 'cheered up,' and Emma remarked the fact again and again, noticing at the same time with extreme satisfaction, that no night now passed without Mirry's putting her hair in pins. There was significance in that. Later on Miriam became really interested in the religion that Gervase explained day by day so conscientiously; she bought, under his guidance, a book of daily prayers and meditations, and to Emma's supreme astonishment, refused to eat beefsteak pudding on a Friday. This change of mind brought her noticeably in closer contact with Lady Brereton, who lent her more books

and in the afternoons supplemented Gervase's instructions. Miriam began to feel a person of some importance. It was 'good style,' she thought, to be High Church. She attended Mr. Martin's daily services and took to dating her letters by the names of Saints' days. She did this once when writing to Kate, presumably in a fit of absent-mindedness, for she might have known beforehand what that young woman's opinion of such vagaries would be.

By return of post she received the following reply :—

Nones,
The Feast of the Translation of St. Sophonisba's Bones!

What's come to you, Mirry? Are you clean gone off your head, or are you going to marry the Squire? I suspect the latter, for you never had an unmethodical madness, or one without some purpose. What a scoundrel you are, Mirry!—and you haven't the slightest idea of it. If you had, you couldn't be so convincing. Self-deception in you takes the place of intellect, you would beat Becky Sharp into fits. You never act, bless you! You *are*. And now you have made up your mind with the help of St. Sophonisba's bones to marry Gervase Alleyne. Go on, my dear, and prosper! For my part I have done with marriage and falling in love and such like. I am vowed to art. All my love and my longing has gone into my pictures. I slave at them at home in my own studio, and I am working at Fleurier's as well. When I sit down after a long day in the life-room my feet feel like jelly after all that standing; they tingle all over.

Good-bye, dear old girl. Tell me when it is all settled, but leave out St. Sophonisba! Your loving sister,

KATE.

As Miriam folded up this letter she turned

pink with pleasure. She could not have listened to a more gratifying suggestion. But her satisfaction soon faded, and common sense chased her from her fool's paradise. She recalled morning after morning, when she had studied the lad's face and found it radiant with the light of enthusiasm, but absolutely devoid of the particular expression that she desired to see. 'It's not so easy to work this affair,' said Miriam to herself. 'He'd be just the same to me if I were a nigger. I'm only a silly soul to him, that's what's wrong.'

But in spite of its obvious truth, King's Stratton did not take that last fact to heart. Miriam was only a silly soul to Gervase, but people put their heads together, and whispered, and tittered, and rejoiced over a bit of gossip that fell like honey upon their tongues. How should they understand an aspiration that struck beyond their horizon?

Even Lady Brereton heard this new gossip almost as soon as it was uttered. It was quick, and virulent, as the plague. The old scandal was still in her ears; that had annoyed, but this grieved her. Gervase was to her as a son; she had superintended his growing.

'Don't spend too much time with Miriam Souls, Gervase.' Duty prompted this advice, therefore it fell awkwardly. 'There are other things in the world.'

'I should just think there are,' replied the young man. 'I have never been through such a crowd of things in my life as this summer. I didn't have a minute even to look at the garden

until June was half over. I have found these last quiet weeks rather jolly, to tell you the truth. And as for Miriam Souls, I have been instructing her, and I am quite proud of my pupil!'

'Indeed, I know that, Gervase,' said Lady Brereton a little sadly.

'Do you mean that people have been talking? I am not a bit surprised. I know King's Stratton. Let them. Who cares! Poor Mirry, she was so unhappy a little while ago.'

'Well, don't make her still more unhappy.'

There was significance in the lady's words. Gervase flushed darkly.

'Oh, Lady Brereton, it isn't like you to say that! That proves the power of gossip when even you—. I can't tell you how different it all is—nothing, *nothing* of that sort. Miriam was absolutely crushed after that engagement.'

'Then there was an engagement?'

'Yes. It was broken off. I tell you this to show you how impossible anything of that kind would be—between—I simply can't talk about it.'

'Then, this is a very dangerous time for the girl, Gervase.'

'Tchah!—oh, forgive me, dearest Lady Brereton, but you don't—it is such an awful idea that men and women can't be friends! You really don't understand!'

'I hope I don't,' she returned with a sigh. 'It is not what I should have wished for you, Gervase, dear; and—well, we are very fond of you.'

'I know! I know! and I can't tell you how

grateful I am. But that poor child! I shall never forget the day when I burst in upon her unexpectedly. She was lying on the sofa crying. I never saw anything so hopeless in my life. She seemed to have reached the end of everything.'

'And now she is better?'

'Oh, so much better, so different; and she is getting hold of things—ideas that we believe in, you and I. That is the whole point. What does it matter if people talk?'

There was a pause, and a pause between two people who are both thinking is always portentous; however, when Gervase burst into another topic, to Lady Brereton's relief the air cleared.

'I have heard from my aunt this morning.'

'Really, what does she say?'

'She is coming to King's Stratton to stay. I suppose I must get some people to meet her.'

Secretly Lady Brereton rejoiced in this announcement. The enforced dissipations incident upon the presence of Mrs. Willoughby Fairfax must to some extent weaken, for the time being at least, the influence of Miriam Souls. She returned home to Weybourne, played chess with Kitten, and discussed the world with Millicent Savile in an easier mind so far as her friend Gervase Alleyne was concerned.

She and Sir James were invited to the first festivity in honour of Mrs. Willoughby Fairfax. This was a dinner-party, and as she looked round the room Lady Brereton experienced a warm satisfaction at the discovery that no member of the Souls family was present.

But they were coming later, so Gervase informed her afterwards, at ten o'clock to the party which followed the dinner, and which during the last three weeks had roused unwonted energy in King's Stratton. Everybody had been invited, and the local dressmaker, engaged four deep, had put up her prices.

Gervase had the gardens illuminated. But the inhabitants of King's Stratton knew that they were going to be, and had known it almost before the idea had even occurred to him.

The whole affair was a great success. Mrs. Willoughby Fairfax declared that the garden and the wood-walk looked like an 'enchanted dream.' Indeed it was very beautiful—a clear blue July night, in which the tiny lamps glowed against colour like a shower of fireflies. Mark Hassall, could he have seen it, would not have recognised the place.

'I am so glad that Mr. Hassall of yours has gone,' said one of the ladies to Gervase. 'He was with you when I stayed with your aunt some years ago. Such a man! And I saw his room too —such a room!—bare boards, and covered with crucifixes! Some people like that kind of thing. I remember Lady Rogers said it was quite too delicious! But I don't: it makes me shiver. I think religion ought to be such a happy influence.'

'You mustn't be too severe upon Mr. Hassall,' Gervase had replied laughing, 'I admire him more than any human being I have ever met, and so would you if you really knew him.'

A part of the charm of Gervase's conversation

lay in the fact that he always credited his companion with all the virtues.

'Staunch friend,' replied the lady, not displeased, and tapping him playfully with her fan. 'Perhaps I should, but—at a distance.'

Before her visit was ended Mrs. Willoughby Fairfax sounded Gervase as to his future. He replied to her questions unreservedly, and his answers filled her with satisfaction, although indeed his political views struck her as rather extreme.

'Still'—she delivered judgment in a manner peculiarly her own—'extremes nowadays are the *only* thing. No middles anywhere, only ends—extreme ends! If you are not extreme as a Liberal the Conservatives will outdo you in passing Liberal measures, and then where are you, I should like to know? If you are not extreme as a Tory you might just as well be a Liberal Unionist. I'm a Conservative, thank Heaven, and an Imperialist. I fear God and honour the King, according to the word of God. I think that all socialists, atheists, and women suffragists ought to be shot. I take in the *Daily Harbinger*, which I trust absolutely, and form my mind upon it; it is a great comfort and saves me a lot of trouble.' Out of breath, the lady paused; Gervase was just about to claim his share of talk when she went on with her oration. 'And so you are a Radical, with leanings towards the working man! Well, well, get in and prosper, and romp into the front bench as soon as you can, never mind how! That is the end in view. Gervase, what a funny little

boy you used to be, to be sure! I was afraid that you would grow up a Dissenter (not that that would matter much, with your extraordinary views). As soon as you could speak you thought that you knew everything, you were quite sure that all the world was going to be damned but you and your nurse. Perhaps you do still, but anyhow you keep it to yourself, and that's the great thing. If you learnt nothing else at Eton and Oxford than to keep your thoughts and feelings to yourself, you have learnt how to be an English gentleman. No, no, I haven't done yet!'

For laughing the young man rose from his seat—he had been fidgeting for some time—and walked to the chimney-piece. If Mrs. Willoughby Fairfax took the hint to mean that she had said enough, he would not object; for indeed she had—more than enough; no human being, and especially, he reflected, no woman, should be allowed to talk in periods!

'But I tell you I haven't done yet! I have something more to say!' she persisted. 'Gervase, when are you going to get married? I don't think it's decent for any young man to be a bachelor—and especially a young man with a place like this. Besides, a good wife would be such a help to you!

'You will be contesting an election soon—some miserable impossible place where you haven't a chance of getting in (but you must have a little buffeting, just to prove your metal, your party will see to that) and, my dear, you will want a wife, you will want one very badly. "A perfect

woman nobly planned," don't you know, "to warm and comfort and command." Have you thought of it?'

Gervase assured his aunt that he had not, whereupon she grew meditative, but still kept him by her, waiting on her thought this time if not on her word. Then, smiling cheerfully—she foresaw an occupation suited to her years, her means, and her distinctive capacities,—she invited him to stay with her in Scotland during September. She then enumerated on her fingers, with some significance, her intended list of guests. 'Two,' she said, and her words were auspicious, 'two ladies have been added during the last five minutes, a blonde and a brunette. Gervase, all my life I have tried to do my best for you. I will not fail you now.'

Then she took his arm and walked slowly with him through the rooms that led into the garden.

'It will be much more pleasant here when you are married, Gervase,' she said brightly in conclusion. 'I do like rooms to have lots of flowers and cushions. You have the flowers, Wilkins sees to that, although Wilkins seems to be getting rather old and infirm to be head-gardener; but there is a terrible dearth of cushions and cosy corners. You want new chintzes too all over the house, and you want new liveries for the servants—something a shade more striking, in my opinion. Now a wife would see to that too. Of course your dinner was admirable, my dear, and so was your party afterwards. The strings of lights between the trees were quite heavenly, I can't imagine anything prettier. But

you want a wife to complete it all—a wife, my dear, a wife!'

Gervase patted his aunt's hand, plumper than it was sixteen years ago, when he would not have thought of doing such a thing. It was extraordinary how the relationship between them had changed; as he grew older and more serious, she became in a sense rejuvenated, and yet even when he was quite a baby he was older than Mrs. Willoughby Fairfax—born older, it seemed.

When he left her he found himself in the fluster of an idea, not new indeed, but one that had never yet been definitely presented to him by another person. A wife! How would that affect the conception that he hardly dared embody even in words—so delicate, so reticent was it in its essence—the ideal of a hidden life consecrated and offered to God—and yet not shut away from human things, but lived in the world, holding a perfect poise through the upheavals of contending factions, the clash of personal ambitions, and the petty frictions and jealousies of social life? This was the heavenly vision as Gervase saw it; he prayed that he might be obedient to it, in its minutest detail.

Mrs. Willoughby Fairfax talked of getting married as she might talk of taking a stroll in the sunshine, and in this aspect the idea had unquestionably its alluring side. But the difficult way was in this case undeniably the right way, and love was too great a passion to be so belittled. Gervase knew definitely that in this matter obedience to the heavenly vision lay in a long

waiting upon Fate. It was not a wife he wanted, but *the* wife; it was not love in the abstract that he desired, but some individual woman—the only possible, inevitable, predestinate She. In the event of finding her he would not hesitate for a moment, for in such conditions, and only in such conditions, God did actually join together. Not finding her he would (he faltered, and added 'by grace') hesitate until death.

When his aunt left King's Stratton, the reading with Miriam Souls was resumed. The girl had now gone through a plentiful course of easy theology, interspersed with a few works on mysticism. But of these the cream only was imparted to her. Gervase did the heavy reading. Sometimes her attention wandered, as when she interrupted him to say that a squirrel was looking at them from the fork of the tree.

And on another day, without any reason that he, or indeed she for that matter, could give, the girl suddenly fainted. Gervase was horribly alarmed. Miriam merely twisted over, and he saw her face from a new angle white to the lips against the grass. He picked her up as well as he could; supported her head and chafed her heavy bloodless hands. If she had not opened her eyes, the news, through Dr. Appleby, would have spread over King's Stratton, augmenting the flare of gossip; but Gervase saw, to his relief, the lids quiver and lift, and in a few moments a fit of crying brought her to her errant senses.

At other times, when not engaged in such

vagaries, she was an apt pupil and a gentle comrade; Gervase began to think that women were more companionable than men. This was his first friendship with a woman of his own age; he did not include Kate, with whom he knew that he had been almost in love. But here he found to his delight that there was no complication of sex; everything was honest and open and cool and as unperplexing as the morning—everything but the scandal-mongering village of King's Stratton, and that he left to work its own damnation.

CHAPTER XIV

THE BLIND LEADS THE BLIND

And so the friendship developed beautifully, until one day, for no reason at all that Gervase could see, Miriam wilfully shattered it. He could not imagine what had happened. A sudden deadly gloom seemed to have fallen on her, a sort of sickness. She would have no more of Gervase, or his reading either : she told him so quite plainly, with a few tears. She did not know what was the matter, but she felt too nervous, she said, to attend : she would read for the present in her own room.

The young man was baffled : it was as though a door had been suddenly shut in his face. In the Middle Ages people would have said that Satan, in his last fight, had taken possession of Miriam's soul : indeed the girl had strangely altered ; looking at her, it seemed to Gervase that she had become a haunted woman.

The thing puzzled him beyond measure. Miriam had responded to his teaching in a manner that had astonished him, and even Lady Brereton (before that uncalled-for warning) had

noticed the improvement in her. Now all was over. Suddenly, without any reason, she had utterly collapsed. The whole thing was a mystery.

There was one explanation of her conduct that he refused to admit. He would not shatter his belief in the possibility of friendship between men and women. Besides, to imagine Miriam to be in love with him would be to prove himself no worthier than the gossips of King's Stratton. That, at least, was inconceivable.

But the girl's restlessness had somehow communicated itself to him. His new occupation brought suddenly to a close, he found that his other interests had somehow lost their zest.

In need of a bracing companion, he thought suddenly of Mr. Money : the Rector's optimism would not annoy him now ; it was just the thing he wanted.

Gervase found him working in his garden, and as he approached Mr. Money looked up with a smile.

'Too late for lupins, eh, my boy! Do you remember digging this very bed and suggesting martyrdom to me as a profession?'

But Gervase had forgotten : he was young, and the little episode was therefore farther away from him than from the older man : to Mr. Money it might have happened yesterday, so vividly did he recall the small grave face of the child, the blue smock, and the greyer blue of the lupins.

Now he laid down his spade, for he could see that Gervase had something to say. He led the way to a seat under an elm. Then he lighted his

pipe, supplied his companion with tobacco, and lolling back comfortably, gazed at the sky.

'Well, my boy, out with it!' he pushed the pipe to the side of his mouth and spoke between his teeth.

With difficulty Gervase explained the situation: he faltered and hesitated, until, looking up suddenly, he perceived that the Reverend Cyril was amused: there was in his manner of smoking a certain jocosity.

'What have I said that is particularly humorous?' asked the young man, with a fillip of temper.

Mr. Money laid a soothing hand upon his knee. 'Don't get excited, dear chap. You are too young to see the joke.' Then he laughed—first a chuckle, then a roar, then another chuckle. It was impossible to feel keen resentment in the face of such exuberant humour; Gervase, although annoyed, laughed with him.

'What a hell on earth you old fellows make for us young ones,' he said. 'You think it is so jolly funny to be under forty!'

'So it is!' said Mr. Money; 'jolly funny!'

Gervase noticed that all the wrinkles round his mouth and eyes pointed upwards.

'That man will laugh himself into his grave at last,' he said to himself.

'Jolly funny!' continued the Rector, 'it's like seeing a play from one side only. I see it from the other side as well—the other side of forty. Eh?'

'Well, you ought to keep what you see to

yourself. There is nothing that shuts a man up so much as feeling that he is a joke. I have felt that I was a joke all my life, until quite lately, and it has had the most stultifying effect.'

'Poor chap,' said the Rector, removing his pipe in order to begin again his complicated laugh; but in the middle he changed his mind and stopped. 'So you think that the young woman is possessed?'

'I didn't say that,' replied Gervase, reddening; 'I said that she might be. All the same, I don't know what I can do.'

'Go away,' said Mr. Money: he seemed now to be laughing through his pipe.

'Go away! How can I? The sickening thing about it is that she was getting on so well: there was such an extraordinary change in her.'

'Oh, I know! I saw her nearly every day, bless you! She was uncommon pious—genuflected like an angel. There was a girl just like her at Southsea, when I was a curate there, she had forty-two confessors. But they never last, my boy. The sun scorches them, poor dears, and they wither away. No roots, no roots!'

'But Miriam wasn't withering away! And now she has gone raving mad, so far as I can see!'

'She is in love, my innocent; and that is a similar disease.'

'In love!'

'With you.'

Gervase sprang to his feet. 'Now, dear old friend, you have proved conclusively how little

use it is to see the play from the other side of forty. That girl was engaged to be married!'

'That's just the reason why she *is* in love with you! Oh, you silly fool, don't, don't be caught by this Miss Miriam! She's a Boots, I tell you!'

'A Boots?'

'Sly-boots, Puss-in-boots—the word Boots covers every form of cattishness. You just go away and stay with friends for a bit.'

'My aunt has invited me to Scotland next month; she—she—er—wants me to get married.' This time it was Gervase who laughed; the picture of Mrs. Willoughby Fairfax rose up in his mind.

'I don't see the connection,' replied Mr. Money, 'unless you are to stop at Gretna Green on the way. But, I tell you this—your aunt will see you married before she wants to, if you stay here! Oh, you silly mouse, you sparrow, you sardine, you—anything that plump soft little cats like to swallow, you don't know what will happen to you if you remain here! You will be gobbled—eaten up, I tell you, before you can say "Jack Robinson"!'

'But I'm not a bit in love with her.'

'That's got nothing to do with it—she'll eat you all the same. Bless my soul, you don't know the awful potentialities of your own nature! She does—the Boots knows—and she'll play on 'em, if you give her a chance. Gervase, you'll be swallowed smiling. You'll cast yourself down her throat with your own hands, and then you'll con-

sider yourself master of the situation. Don't say that I've mixed my metaphors—that isn't a metaphor!'

Gervase was silent. There was something blatant about Mr. Money that always disgusted him. He was sometimes rather funny, when one considered the sense of what he said; but just at present Gervase was far too irritable to consider humour of any kind. He disliked the Rector's tone in speaking of Miriam Souls: it was lacking in courtesy. He could not have mentioned even a light woman with more freedom. What right had Mr. Money to damage the girl to him in this way? Also his phraseology was questionable. 'Boots!' Gervase detested the word.

'You'd better get out of it, Gervase,' reiterated the Rector solemnly. 'You've compromised yourself, my boy.'

'*Her*, you mean.

'And yourself also. I'm a brute, but I don't care a button about her. The whole place is talking about *you*, Gervase.'

'Pleasant people—the inhabitants of King's Stratton! And most of them see life from the other side of forty.'

'That's why they talk. They—know.'

'Oh, Mr. Money!' Gervase, who had been walking ferociously up and down the lawn, now planted himself in a chair opposite the Rector. He faced him, sitting upright, his hands upon his knees.

'Look here now, I'm going to explain, and I won't be baffled any more by your blessed experi-

ence and humour, and all the rest of it. I'm going to talk now!' Having made that statement, he was silent: again the force of convention shut his mouth. 'You see I believe in——'

'Who? Miss Miriam?'

'I was going to say my religion,' replied Gervase, reddening.

'By all means. So do I, I hope. But go on.'

'Well, I think it is far and away the most valuable possession a human being can have. It is everything to me.'

'Yes. But what's that got to do with it?'

'I'll tell you. I found a girl who had somehow lost her hold on life. She was miserable. She didn't believe in God. I wanted to make her understand that it didn't matter what she felt, or what she believed in, but that God believed in her; that whatever happened to her happened by His will, and was therefore the right thing.'

'You should have brought her to me: I was the proper person to teach her, not an inexperienced young man like you.'

This silenced Gervase. He could not explain that it was just this 'experience,' this humour, this maddening tendency to laugh at everybody and everything, this want of delicacy, this robustness, this exuberance, that had made such a thing impossible. Had he brought Miriam Souls to Mr. Money, he was quite sure that her conversion would never have been achieved. And in this, although for other reasons than those which he took note of, he was probably quite right.

'How could I?' at first he faltered; then,

'Why, you would have called her a Boots,' he added, smiling.

Once more, and for the last time that afternoon in Gervase's hearing, the Rector laughed.

'Very likely. She wants a whipping. When is a Boots not a Boots? When she is beaten. I could have thought of a pun for that answer, if you had given me more time.'

Gervase could stand it no longer.

'Good-bye, Mr. Money,' he said shortly, holding out his hand. 'You have been very hard upon Miriam Souls.'

'Not half hard enough, my boy,' said the Rector good-temperedly, wringing the impassive fingers. 'Not half hard enough. You get out of this, Gervase. Get out of it. Fly. The air of King's Stratton is fatal to you at present. Don't listen to what anybody says. You've no obligation to that young woman. You've——'

'Obligation?'

'Yes. She'll make you think that you are bound to marry her. She is in love with you, I tell you, and she'll stick at nothing.'

Gervase flushed to brick colour. He longed to give the Rector a friendly punch in the ribs, which might have relieved his feelings. As it was, he smothered them with difficulty, and the two walked down the garden path to the gate, discoursing amicably on flowering shrubs.

But all the time he talked, the lad's mind was busy with a different subject. If this was muscular Christianity, he preferred the more ethereal sort known to the saints. How differently Mark

Hassall would have treated this affair! At least, would he? Hassall was a misogynist, if ever there was one. Gervase began to doubt his justice also. Poor Miriam, she would fare very badly at the hands of these ecclesiastics, Gervase feared. There was still in them a remnant of that deep distrust of woman characteristic no less of the Catholicism of the Middle Ages than of the Puritanism of a later day. The face of the Church might change, and old Priest become new Presbyter, old Presbyter new Priest, but woman was always suspect. And no wonder—in one aspect she represented a temptation.

When his anger against Mr. Money had died down—it lasted during the whole of his walk from the Rectory to the Hall, while he strode along knocking off the tops of the hedge-flowers as he passed—Gervase grew low-spirited. There was nothing to be done, it seemed. He had worked his best for Miriam, and he had failed. He had prayed, he had laboured all in vain. What was this mysterious barrier which not only kept her from him, but held her back from the new life which she had just begun to desire? Could it really be that she loved him?

That question, having once taken definite form, grew prodigiously: it was like yeast, and created a bubble and ferment of the soul that he could not suppress. He had another grievance now against Mr. Money, for he it was, poor unsuspecting man, who had placed the trouble there. And it grew, and grew, and grew—the pest! In one short night, a restless one, it had pervaded all his

being. It took shape in dreams that arose crude and astonishing from the unexpected depths of his own consciousness.

Gervase arose the next morning as weary as when he had gone to bed. The question had given birth to a horde of new ideas, new questions, new impulses, new desires—they all clamoured, and in the stir of their many voices his inward peace was lost.

Then it seemed as though the darkness that had fallen upon Miriam Souls was upon him also, brought about by this impossible, detestable, ridiculous question. Did this girl love him or not? Was it merely an unfortunate, a misplaced human love that was working the mischief? Or was it something deeper still, some evil in the soul that warred against the power of righteousness?

It is impossible for a young man to ask himself questions of this sort for a night and the greater part of a day without losing in some degree his sense of proportion. A feverish desire to know the answer grew up in Gervase's mind—just to know, to know once and for all. He could go away then peaceably. Of course it would mean that he had made a horrible mistake, and that his ideal of possible friendship between the sexes would have dropped for ever; and for Miriam it would mean probably a short and a bitter unhappiness, not an incurable one. He remembered Jack and—tried to laugh.

He did not succeed, for, oddly enough, now the thought of Jack in any connection with Miriam made him unaccountably angry.

Still, he would go away: the thing was obviously impossible: marriage between himself and Miriam Souls would spell misery. He shuddered to imagine Mrs. Willoughby Fairfax's opinion of such a proceeding.

Besides, he did not love the girl.

Still—to know!—only to know! A dozen times a day he set, as it were, weights upon his feet to prevent himself from walking over to the Souls' cottage to ask for her: his limbs seemed to be leagued against his will. And afterwards he grew doubtful as to the truth of his last assertion. That also became a question. Did Miriam love him?—that was a puzzle bad enough; but did he love Miriam?—that was worse! Perhaps this misery was love! He rubbed his eyes and his hot forehead. What on earth did it all mean? He had never felt such a fool before. He was beset with the thought of the wretched girl, he was sick of her, he hated her, but he could not forget her.

The next day he found that this disturbance of the spirit had become a real sickness that paralysed his will. He tried to write, but he could do nothing: he sat at his writing-table making small black rounds with his pen on pieces of blotting-paper. If Miriam Souls was possessed, then he, Gervase Alleyne, was possessed also, for it was indeed a kind of madness from which he now suffered.

'The devil!' he exclaimed. 'Who the devil said that there was not a devil!' He thought of the grotesque demons of the early Italian painters,

and for the first time understood their significance. The Middle Ages had realised the devil; they understood the malignant humour, the grotesque stupidity, and yet the power of this particular fiend, who could use the spirit so cleverly, in order to testify to the supremacy of the flesh. This was no radiant Lucifer, but a mocking imp with a cloven hoof.

He left his writing, and spent the rest of the morning in the oratory; but he left it wearier and more dry of spirit, if that were possible, than before: there was no room for what Mark Hassall would have termed 'the incoming grace.'

About this time the following extract appeared in his diary:—

July 30, 1904.—I am suffering from acute mental sickness—a sort of hysteria, I suppose—that has dropped upon me suddenly. All the despondencies that I ever knew in childhood and early youth seem to have revived. I have never before so realised my loneliness. The house is to me haunted, dark, and full of voices, and I the only living thing in it. I cannot fight; I have no more weapons. I am no longer interested in anything: the world seems to have shrivelled into dust and ashes. My whole life is now centred round a woman, a woman with whom I am not even sure that I am in love. I certainly don't feel any of the extraordinary exaltation and tenderness that lovers describe. I only feel uncertainty, an overpowering unrest, and a wild, blind jealousy at the thought of any other man taking her from me. Perhaps this is love: it is a ghastly experience.

And God is silent: I cannot pray. There is a bitter irony in all this, for I was to have been the one to lead her to peace. I was so sure, so positive. Perhaps it is a

punishment for my presumption. Well, I can do no more—only wait until it passes. I am torn between two natures, it seems. If I could only go through life blithely and easily, like Jack, for instance, this sort of thing would not have happened. I should have been in love and out again a dozen times by now. But I can't: my whole training is set against it.

I can only stick to what I take to be my bare duty now and live on, with my eyes, and ears, and brain, and heart shut, as it were, and wait until this passes. And the sickening thing is that it is all about nothing: it is a chimera, a phantom of the imagination, that has attacked me. God help me. Here things that are, are put to flight by things that are not. All our greatest troubles are those that never happen, it seems; and our keenest pangs are those that have no material source. Am I going mad, I wonder!

Into the midst of speculations such as these Emma Souls pushed her way. She had not been blind to the course of events; and she came now as the result of a decision, confided some time back to a sleepless pillow.

It was evening when she arrived. Gervase was reading in the library. He had felt his solitude more than usual to-day: he compared himself to a regretful Adam, still in Paradise alone, having resisted the deep sleep and the greater ill.

Bennett opened the door to tell him that Mrs. Souls was in the morning-room and desired to speak with him.

The news hit Gervase, for he drew a sharp breath. And, although annoyed with himself, furious at his agitation, he could not help being aware that as he shut the book his hands trembled.

Emma looked singularly unobtrusive. She was

dressed more quietly than usual, but she carried a small black bag and a pocket handkerchief. These appurtenances were with Emma the sign of some untoward happening : she carried them importantly, grasping them with a purpose. When Gervase appeared, she rose to her feet and greeted him somewhat stiffly.

Then, 'What have we done, Gervase, that you never come near us now?' she asked.

The words, the complaint, came of themselves, there was no holding them back.

'I stay away, Mrs. Souls, at Miriam's wish.'

Emma knew that this was rubbish.

'Have you quarrelled, then?' she asked sceptically.

'Oh, no. What makes you think so?'

'Because—why should Mirry want you to stay away? Oh, Gervase, Mirry is very miserable.'

There was a perceptible pause, during which the woman grew hotter, the young man paler.

At last Emma began again. 'Gervase, Mirry is a great deal to me. Now that Kate is in Paris, she is my only child. I—I can't bear her to be so unhappy.'

Gervase shifted his chair awkwardly.

'My dear Mrs. Souls, what can I do further? Let me explain. I called at your house one day and found Miriam crying. She told me that she was miserable. Whereupon I suggested that she needed a rule to live by. I lent her books, and tried to help her as far as I could. She certainly grew happier. Until one day—well, one day she seemed to me to be like a person who had

received a blow—almost out of her mind. She asked me then not to come any more, and I could do nothing but obey. That is all I know.'

Emma began to cry. But Gervase had now had some experience of women's tears in Miriam, and they no longer filled him with the same horror and deep distress as formerly. They were lighter things than he had imagined. So he remained unperturbed, even by her last flourish with the pocket-handkerchief. He even pretended not to see.

'You don't know much of the heart of a young girl, Gervase,' said Emma, sniffing. 'I dare say you hadn't a notion what you were doing, but all the same you have treated Mirry cruelly! I know—for—for'—here sobs helped out the tears —'I have borne it all myself!'

Emma was close now upon the past; but she sheered off it; Miriam and the present claimed her.

'Will you kindly explain what on earth you mean?' said Gervase icily. 'I am afraid that I don't understand.'

'Oh, my dear boy, what a voice—and to me, too! I never knew your dear mother, it is true, but had I known her, I am positive that we should have been inseparable. It is difficult to explain—very difficult—and yet I must. You have made my girl love you, Gervase. You wouldn't leave her alone, but kept coming and coming, and taking her out into the woods, and lending her books; and now—well, the mischief is done now! And—I don't know how to help her!'

'Good God! Good God!' Gervase sprang

to his feet, and walked rapidly up and down the long room. On the wall behind him hung the portraits of his parents—his father with his full, handsome, powerful face ; his mother in her ethereal beauty. Their eyes, it seemed, were fixed upon their son. Perhaps in some dim predestined way they were responsible for the ensuing struggle.

'Good God!' Gervase knew now what it had all meant, and it was time he did. His eyes gleamed in the half light, lit by an inward fire, a fire not to be easily put out. His white nervous hands, held behind him, clasped and unclasped themselves ; his whole long thin body was strained to quick convulsive movement. Through it all his boyishness was almost grotesque.

Emma grew frightened : she had not considered the effect of her words. She was sorry for Gervase : he looked frightfully worried—almost as ill as Miriam was herself. Still, he must have expected this visit. He knew the world. He could not have spent three years at Oxford, to say nothing of all he had done since, without finding out that a young man cannot with impunity be on such terms of friendship with a young girl. Impossible !

Then Emma began to talk. She poured forth a stream of argument that grew in force and volume as it proceeded. She did not reproach him, she did not ask for anything : she only made her statement of damning fact. She and Miriam, it was clear, had not understood Gervase's meaning —neither had King's Stratton, for that matter. He did not love the girl apparently, and did not

mean to marry her—Emma had nothing to say against that. A loveless marriage was misery—ah, did she not know it! (Again she neared the past, but wisely eschewed it.) Only she had hoped—surely it was very natural?—that, for poor dear Mirry's sake, things might have been different. Mirry was a girl of deep feeling, and what had befallen her was neither more nor less than a tragedy—a tragedy—yes, indeed, the girl had wished that she was dead, times and times. Her sobs had penetrated a locked door! Emma hoped that she might do herself no violence.

'And you know, Gervase, we shall have to leave the place now! It's very sad, I can't bear to think of it, for I have lived here a long time; but it isn't fair to Mirry to remain. She's become a laughing-stock to all the neighbours. Do you know, she can't go in and buy a penn'orth o' blue at the general shop without meeting nods and winks, and that's an unpleasant thing for a girl of refined feeling—you know it is. And it isn't only the village folks either who look down their noses at her; it's the gentry as well. Lady Brereton hasn't asked her to Weybourne now for more than a fortnight. She avoids her, it's easy to see that, and she used to be so kind and friendly. Then there's the Rector! Do you know, Gervase, Mr. Money's manner to Mirry is downright insulting! He doesn't seem to like to see her at church even; he——' Emma went on talking, but Gervase heard only these last two sentences. Their truth struck at him, until the iron entered in. 'That girl is a Boots,' he could

almost hear the Rector's voice. 'Fly from her, or she'll eat you!'

This—*this* was what he had brought upon the poor, innocent, wayward Miriam, whom he had tried to save. This was the peace he had helped her to, the peace beyond all thought, the peace of God! The knowledge was agony, agony that increased as Emma, fluent and monotonous, reiterated again and again her appraisement of the facts. It was as if she gathered up every thread of his previous pain and wove them into one long torture of remorse. He could bear it no longer. He stood in front of Emma.

'Stop!' he said, his uplifted hand emphasising the words. 'I tell—you—to stop!'

She did stop, frightened. His eyes gleamed with that strange fire she had noticed a little while ago: now she saw that they were slightly blood-shot. His face was ashen, his lips compressed, and his hand shook.

'Gracious, Gervase!' ejaculated Emma. You're all nerves! Fancy that now! I never! I never in my life saw a man look like you. I can't help it, my dear; I have the girl to think of. And you young men are so thoughtless, you don't consider, you know. But there—don't worry more than you can help! I am sorry for you too. I don't want you to marry her, you know, if you don't love her, even if she does break her heart.' Here Emma burst into new sobbing and covered her face with the pocket-handkerchief.

Gradually Gervase hardened into passivity, therefore the suppressed flame burnt inwardly

with the greater fierceness. He stood silently looking at her.

'I'm going now, Gervase,' sobbed Emma. I've said my say and now I've done with it. Don't bear me a grudge. I've known you a long time. There, shake hands, Gervase; no ill-feeling, I hope.'

'No, Mrs. Souls.' The young man held out his hand. 'But you must give me time to consider what you have been saying. It has come to me as a great surprise, almost a shock.'

('Gracious!' said Emma to herself, 'and where were his precious eyes I'd like to know!')

'I will come and see you to-morrow and talk about this quietly. We are both—both a little upset to-night.'

'Yes, we are!' said Emma, popping her damp handkerchief into her reticule; 'that's quite true. There's thunder in the air to-night, and thunder always upsets me. You come to-morrow, Gervase, when it's cleared off a bit, and we'll talk then. You've taken it very well, I must say, like a thorough gentleman; but then you always were grand in your notions.'

She talked all the way through the adjoining rooms and out into the hall, where Bennett waited at the door.

'*Au revoir!*' she said on the step; 'to-morrow then!' Bennett shut the door behind her.

'It's going to be an ugly night, sir, there's a bad storm brewing.'

Gervase merely nodded and turned into the library.

CHAPTER XV

THE DITCH

A GREAT master of music has, in the terms and language of his own art, set forth the following allegory :—

The three Norns pass through their fingers the ever-moving thread of the life of man. There comes to them, however, in the midst of the fulfilment of their work for which they exist, a sense of coming change, a vague presage of disaster, until, at a quick crisis, the thread snaps suddenly, for Man has dared to take his Destiny into his own hands.

A moment such as this arrives in every life, but few know when it comes. It passes unheeded and again the Norns hold the thread. Thus it was with Gervase Alleyne. Governed by overwhelming circumstances he lost, at a critical moment, the control of his own soul, and it followed its stronger destiny gaily and swiftly to the first great crisis. He did not, like Siegfried, snatch at the thread of Fate.

To-night it seemed to Gervase that the air of the house had grown dense and stifling. He

could bear it no longer. Disregarding Bennett's warning of an impending storm, he pushed open the library window and walked out into the garden. He scarcely knew what he was doing. He felt his body as a sheaf of nerves bound into one life ; it existed as a single pulse throbbing in hot air. A similar fit of passion had possessed him when as a child, on the day that his mother died, his body had, under the strain of that great agony, failed him ; but at the same time it had brought him back to sanity, for then the mental trouble was resolved into a childish sickness. Now it seemed as though the physical part of him was, in a sense, non-existent. He felt life beating through him, that was all. There was war in his soul ; remorse, rebellion, doubt, and desire strove for the mastery, each urging the other the more inevitably ; conscience was silent, and the sight of the soul, the power of heavenly vision, finally obscured.

He had moved with rapid footsteps towards the wood-walk. The night was unnaturally silent, for the world of living things awaited the coming storm, dumb but alert ; except for a few notes of calling birds, that fell in a strange anxiety through the stillness, there was no sound. Gervase walked towards his friendly ash, the tree he had when a child endowed with an almost human soul. There at its foot he had often in the past cried out his childish troubles. He was inclined to do the same to-night. All human creatures are at heart children. When there is nobody to see, they drop the pretence of dignified maturity, and,

lying upon the ground, sob out their hearts in broken simple words. But he was held by the enchanted stillness that hung about the wood—a sense of fear almost ; it mastered him, and he felt a kind of dumb pleasure in the realisation. He was one with the earth. Like her he was at war with himself, and like her he was expectant of a crisis.

He plunged into the depths of the trees, and soon he heard a rustling, a beating, and a stirring ; the rain had begun. A few drops penetrated the roof of leaves and fell upon his face. He looked up into the blackness and listened, listened for he knew not what.

Then a sound fell upon his ears, a low sigh, a moan long drawn and shuddering, the noise of an animal in distress, then quick-drawn breathy sobs. Something in the woods was crying to-night. What was it ? He could not tell. But his blood knew the voice ; it leapt in his veins and his heart beat wildly. It was a human creature that was crying ; his body recognised the sound before his brain. Once more a trembling seized him and he was swept along by the force of the storm.

'Who is there ?' Words sounded forced and unnatural among the inarticulate voices of the earth. 'Is anybody there ?'

The crying ceased.

'Is anybody there ?' said Gervase again.

'Yes,' the answer came at last through the beating and flapping of the leaves. 'It is I, Miriam. Oh, I wish I could die ! I wish—I wish I could die !'

'What are you doing here?'

As he spoke, something, not himself, impelled Gervase forward. Scarcely knowing what he did he stretched out his arms towards the place where the voice came from. At last in the darkness his trembling hands touched a face—her face, chilly and wet with rain; they dropped to her shoulders, wet too, then through her clinging dripping bodice he could feel her arms. She did not resist him; she had waited a long time for this moment.

'Miriam, Miriam!' He held her close to him. A kind of numbness fell upon his brain in which all thought was lost.

But the girl gave him no answer. 'Ah, Miriam!' He crushed her now, closer, closer, roughly, fiercely—he could feel her heart beating against his own. Suddenly a flash of lightning lit up the trees with a metallic brilliance and the ensuing thunder broke into the very heart of the woods. Miriam trembled. Gervase could feel the shiver of her body between his arms. It added a new impetus to his passion, he was on fire with her now—and mad.

With a low cry the girl struggled to free herself. 'Gervase, you don't know! you don't know!'

'What don't I know? I know that you are to be my wife; that is all there is to know. All I want to know. By heaven, I never lived until this minute! What a fool I've been—I——'

'Your wife! No, no, my God! Ah, Gervase! listen——'

But he stopped her mouth with kisses, kisses in which there was no tenderness, only passion—a wild furious hunger.

The girl bent beneath his frenzy, lying passive in his arms, and as her resistance to him died, so his soul revolted at his own savagery. The past came to his aid. Strong as his desire towards her came the inhibition, the human mastery.

'Miriam, you must go home now, you must go home at once; it is getting late.'

'Yes, Gervase.' The girl pulled herself away from him and stood upright. She put up her hands and pushed back her heavy hair dripping and sodden with the rain. Then she stooped, and picking up her skirt, twisted the water from it with both hands.

'How wet you are! You are wetter than I am. How did you get in such a state?'

'I went down to the river to-night,' she said in a low voice. 'I went to kill myself; but I couldn't—the water was so cold; it brought me to my senses, I think. I walked in a little way and stopped.'

'To—— Oh, Mirry, Mirry, was it as bad as that? How little I knew! How little I really helped you! But you are glad now?'

'Yes, I'm glad now,' she said slowly in an uncertain voice, 'but—but—there's something! Oh, it's no good—you wouldn't let me talk when I wanted to; and—it's too late now!'

'Talk! Of course not. There's nothing to say except that you must be off home at once, and I will come and see you to-morrow.'

'Good-night.' She lifted her face, and suddenly and swiftly kissed him upon the lips.

'Good-night.'

Without another word she left him, running quickly down the sloping path of the wood walk.

This was the wooing of Gervase Alleyne, the wooing waited for and prayed over; but the time to weep for it had not come yet.

The young man stood listening until the sound of footsteps had died away. Then he turned too and walked towards the house. His head felt hot inside, and bursting. He did not pause until he had reached his own room, the little bedroom he had occupied since he was a boy.

There on the walls were the old sporting prints belonging to his father, and over his bed was his mother's crucifix, the feet of which he had so often kissed.

'Soul of Christ, sanctify me;
Body of Christ, save me;
Passion of Christ, strengthen me;
O good Jesu, hear me,
In the hour of my death call me,
That with thy saints I may praise thee
For ever and ever. Amen.'

That was the prayer. But to-night he was in no state to pray, although according to old custom he flung himself upon his knees. What use? His overstrained nerves were taking a savage revenge. Lying on his bed he wondered how he might endure the sleepless hours until the morning.

Life was crueller and more powerful than he had thought. What precept, what petition could help a man engulfed in such a whirlpool?

He lay with closed eyes and parted lips, but his brain worked perpetually. Towards the morning he fell into a heavy sleep.

CHAPTER XVI

KING'S STRATTON RECEIVES THE NEWS

RUMOUR is seldom vindicated so completely as it was in the case of the Squire of King's Stratton. A thing hinted at, whispered, surmised, seldom spoken of directly, now came out from the debateable land of conjecture into the blaring light of accomplished fact; it passed quickly and simply into verity. Those people who were the most responsible for its being, were inconsequently annoyed.

'Between you and me and the bed-post'—a phrase at least suggestive of discretion—was now exchanged for 'Of course anybody might have seen it with half an eye!'

King's Stratton had the news at the first moment possible; and, had it but known, might have boasted of a greater achievement still—that of itself creating the event, by the mere force of words making a something out of nothing.

Millicent Savile guessed at this part of the truth.

'Scandal has made this engagement, Pippin,' said she. 'This is the house that Talk built.

If a fiction is repeated often enough, it becomes a fact. I wonder how many unhappy marriages gossip is responsible for!'

'Poor Gervase!' replied Lady Brereton; 'I distrust that girl!'

'You stood up for her the other day.'

'The circumstances were different. I had not thought of her in—this connection.'

'She has risen on the stepping-stone of a dead flirtation to higher things. Well, well, a young man as old-fashioned and high-flown and chivalrous as Gervase Alleyne was bound to come to grief some day. I am very glad that I have not got a son!'

'But I think that I should rather like my son to be old-fashioned and high-flown and chivalrous,' said Lady Brereton slowly; 'every mother would, I suppose!'

'Then he would come to grief like Gervase. Heavens above, what is to be done! Little boys ought to have measles and whooping-cough before they go to the public school. However, they generally do—a good preparatory school arranges that. But life—there is no preparatory school for life!'

'What do you call Eton and Oxford?'

'When a boy comes through Eton and Oxford as untouched as Gervase Alleyne (it is the ambition of everybody, mind you, that he should—muscles and morals both intact), look at the result! He is at the mercy of the first Miriam Souls he meets.'

'Oh no, he isn't,' said Lady Brereton quietly. 'You have been reading too many novels, Millicent.

The ordinary young man is not very good or very bad, simply a person who lives an ordinary decent life and doesn't bother his head much about anything.'

'Gervase Alleyne is not like that.'

'No—poor Gervase!'

'Have you told Marion?'

Lady Brereton shook her head, and a quick shade passed over her face. The affairs of Gervase Alleyne had not been discussed by mother or daughter of late, for Marion had become strangely reticent on the subject, and her mother did not wish to press it.

Gervase himself had never been so miserable in his life as he was during these last weeks before his wedding. His engagement had estranged him, it seemed, from his best friends. Mrs. Willoughby Fairfax—not that she could be counted under the last category—had sent pages of fluent indignation. Mark Hassall had written shortly, as though he could not quite regain a conventional balance after the shock of such intelligence.

'There is not much for a solitary man like me to say to you, my dearly loved boy,' he wrote; 'I must leave congratulatory speeches to others: only this—and coming from me you will pardon the warning,—love your wife as much as you can, Gervase, and that will be a great deal; but love her in the right way and all will be well with you. God is a jealous God, and when the creature is put in the place of the Creator, many and manifold are the miseries which result. Men think that the fault lies in the nature of love; but it lies rather in the wrong adjustment of love to life. Remember this—all sin is dislocation, and most pain comes as the means to remedy

it. That is all. I don't want to be a raven croaking at the door of your happiness, and believe me that as I love you I rejoice in your joy. I must get to know your wife.'

Gervase never dreamt how much Hassall had grudged that last sentence; but he might have guessed, for of all the inhabitants of King's Stratton the most peculiarly repugnant to a man of his temperament was Miriam Souls. The letter, though austere, was kindly; it held no hint of surprise, no far-away echo of that word spoken behind his back so freely by even his best friends. But the word had its counterpart in a thought unuttered, unformulated, that lay silent at the young man's heart, the root of all bitterness—'Fool! Fool! Fool!' He passed from one mood to another, now blinded by desire, now racked by regret for a lost vision, now full of heroic aspirations for the future, in which mood he determined to be to his bride, father, preceptor, and friend as well as husband. Yet ever and again this mood was daunted by the suspicion that all would be unavailing; for even in the moments of intoxication which youth did not deny him, he never lost consciousness of the truth that what he had won, what he held, was in no sense the ideal capture. He had no joy in the challenge which he threw down to the judgment of his friends; for him the imperious impulse of life blent itself strangely with a sense of duty that must be carried through now even to the end.

CHAPTER XVII

IN WHICH GERVASE IS WAYLAID BY A DAY-DREAM

'I SUPPOSE that your mother is pleased?' said Mabel Pike.

'Of course she is!' returned Kate impatiently. An open letter lay in her lap, and she crumpled it as though inspired by some personal animosity. 'It'll pull her up into her precious Past!'

'Whatever do you mean?' said Mabel.

'Oh, never mind! You wouldn't understand. But I hate climbing into things by the help of other people.'

'You needn't be afraid of that. Your climbing is done by your own——'

'Power of sticking. Yes, I suppose so. I never let an aching back stand in my way. But Mirry is different, you know. She's more of a lady than I am. I am so coarse I would always rather do things for myself than let other people do them for me. Oh, good gracious—but it isn't that!'

'What is it, then?'

'She isn't good enough for him—I didn't realise that at first.'

'Is he so good?'

'Yes—the best. And he doesn't know her. She'll break his heart to bits—that's what's making me mad.'

'You care for him more than for her. You care for him an awful lot.'

'Do I?' A sudden alarm shone in the girl's eyes. 'Mabel, do you think I do?'

'I guess so,' was the laconic reply. 'I don't suppose you'll stay at King's Stratton longer than you can help, will you?'

'Why shouldn't I?'

'Oh, you must find that out,' said her friend with a laugh.

But Kate was determined not to give herself any chance of finding it out. It was arranged that she should leave Paris for King's Stratton a fortnight before the wedding, and return the day after; and even that short visit was difficult enough to arrange, for she had more than a year's work already on hand. Mabel Pike now lived in a Students' Pension, and Kate rented a flat and a studio of her own, having taken up the life of the bachelor artist-woman in good earnest. Like all successful people, she found the world kind and encouraging. She had through her art discovered the means of unlocking her heart to it, and the world is quick to give a return to such an offering; for in its cynical wisdom it knows well that only genius can supply that key, and even beyond wealth does the world value genius. So from afar off, as it were, and through many different channels, it supplied Kate with the means of freedom—it gave

her money, position. Emma realised but little of all this ; she never could see beyond her immediate surroundings, and now Miriam's coming marriage banished all else from her mind. Kate had sent her a cheque at the beginning of the summer, and 'a very handsome one' Emma had declared it to be. She had written effusive acknowledgments, but beyond a vague surmise she knew nothing of the state of her eldest daughter's banking account.

Kate was to be Miriam's bridesmaid. She had laughed with a certain bitterness when her sister had made the request ; and then in bravado—intending to prove her outward worth at least to the eyes of her future brother-in-law—she had ordered such a dress that even Mabel Pike opened her eyes in amazement. When it came home Kate did not even want to try it on.

It was a grey day when she started on her journey ; and she drove across Paris in a kind of reverie, not much aware of outward happenings. However, the sight of Mrs. Willoughby Fairfax, whose destination evidently lay in the same direction, and who crossed the Channel with a maid, a footman, and two little dogs in blue ribbon bows, recalled her abstracted sense of humour. Unrecognised herself, she watched that lady quietly, and on her arrival set forth to her mother and Miriam the many undreamt-of requirements essential to a lady of position on a somewhat choppy crossing.

'"God bless the Squire and his relations, and keep us in our proper stations ! "' she added somewhat maliciously in conclusion.

'Now, there's a nasty thing to say!' exclaimed Emma; 'belittling your sister like that! Mrs. Willoughby Fairfax is going to be Mirry's aunt by marriage.'

'Yes, I know,' said Kate, 'and soon the village will be decorated, and there will be flags and banners and hullaballooing for Mirry's wedding.'

Directly she had spoken she was ashamed of herself, and yet that small devil of derision that sat in her heart refused to be blinded. When the time came and she must meet 'the squire,' she wondered if she would be able decently to veil its presence.

She need not have troubled herself. Gervase walked into the cottage on the day after her arrival, and the devil in question fled incontinently. Kate was alone, for Emma and Miriam were visiting the village dressmaker, and after the first greeting it seemed that the conversation begun in the dog-cart, on the way to Harboard station, had been allowed to lapse but for a few minutes. They took it up—only with a difference—where it had dropped six years ago. To Gervase conversation with Kate was, as it had always been, the easiest thing in the world. No preface was wanted to his thought, and only a few words were needed to embody it. Laughter flashed from one to the other, and in the happy exchange of their ideas that strange peace, before experienced in her presence, began to pervade the young man's being. So they sat and talked in the little smirking drawing-room, and as they talked they watched each other's faces in a sort of wonder, for time had brought to each a fuller beauty of completion. Gervase felt a

sudden pang as he noticed once more the golden bloom of that face washed in with sunshine; it brought back to him the quick presage of misfortune that befell him six years before, when he looked his last upon her at the cross-roads. Now they met again at another crisis, metaphorically a second cross-roads. Oxford had wrought a great change in his life, marriage would work a greater, and—somehow Kate was always there to usher in the event.

It could not be helped that they happened to see things in the same way, but it was an unfortunate circumstance. Still, for the life of her, Kate could not alter her opinions, although she could hold her tongue, and that she did most successfully during the first three days of her visit. On the fourth, her restraint gave way.

Gervase had brought down with him to the cottage a pearl pendant as a present to his bride-elect; it was an old-fashioned circle with a space inside for holding hair or a miniature, and to Miriam's eye, in spite of the great beauty of the pearls, exceedingly plain and insignificant. She thanked him with the best grace she could, but, as Emma always said, 'Mirry was never one to hide her feelings.'

In a heat of shame at her sister's crassness, Kate flung herself into the breach. The ornament was charming—exquisite—Mirry was a lucky girl! It held about it an old-world atmosphere. She had seen it before—but where? She could not remember! Ah yes, she recalled it now—worn

by a lady in a blue dress painted by Fragonard—the thing was in the Louvre.

Kate had expressed herself so forcibly that her cheeks were still flushed when Gervase took his leave. He felt that he had been abundantly thanked, and his gift appreciated—he did not pause to think by whom.

When he had gone Miriam turned upon her sister.

'Whatever did you want to say all that for?'

'The thing was lovely and you didn't care for it.'

'Well—what's that to you?' Miriam was angry; she felt her taste questioned. Kate, who had broken her self-imposed rôle of silence, was also annoyed.

'It's nothing to me, of course, but I didn't want him to find out.'

'What?'

'Where he had cast his pearls!'

The moment she had said it, Kate could have bitten her tongue, and from henceforward she swore to herself to guard her words. She kept out of Gervase's way during this time, and it was not difficult, for she found a multiplicity of duties of which not the least was the rearranging of Miriam's trousseau and the sweeping away of superfluous trimming—flounces, flowers, and feathers of all kinds.

But all the time her hands were thus employed her brain worked. She became beset by an idea—that Gervase did not love her sister. Then, what in the world had ever possessed him to become

engaged to her? She could not guess, and indeed had she been put in possession of the facts, the entire truth would ever be a riddle to her. But the thing worked in her mind; day by day she caught herself watching the engaged couple and wondering. Perhaps a hidden disappointment prompted the suspicion. However that might be, she did not attempt to answer the question, and the world grew to her as black as ashes. Mark Hassall could not have struggled with that mood, which he termed the 'sin of *accidie*,' more valiantly than did Kate: she fought her battle—a battle that nobody in the world even guessed at—and the only outward sign of the struggle was a certain falling away of flesh about the cheeks and an increase of the grey shadow just beneath the eyes.

She was, of course, not deserving of any sympathy, for she had chosen her life, and was making a success of it on the lines which she had marked out for herself. Gervase Alleyne was nothing to her. Why then, in the name of common sense, should the thought of his marriage with Miriam cause her this unhappiness?

No explanation was forthcoming, and yet the fact remained; further—perhaps because of it—there had grown up in her during these last days a curious perception of unspoken things chiefly concerning other people. She endeavoured to translate it into words, to satisfy her own blunt truthfulness: 'Mother is wild with joy at the wedding; everybody else is wild with rage. Mirry—I can't make out Mirry—she is like a drowning person who has just touched land. She doesn't

love Gervase, though. And—nobody sees this but me—Gervase does not love Mirry.'

As the days went by, only this last thought remained with her strongly insistent; all the rest dropped away. She found that she did not care a pin what Emma, King's Stratton, or even Mirry herself thought about the matter; but the bare fact that Gervase Alleyne did not love the woman he was going to marry remained a tragedy. Gervase had always been to her a person who lived beyond the commonplaces of life; he measured them by different standards from those of his neighbours—she had found that out long ago. He stood to her romantically, as the inevitable hero. And now this strenuous excellence was about to decline to—Mirry! She could not bear to think of it. That he should mix with such infinitely inferior clay seemed to her little short of monstrous. Had the girl chosen been Marion Brereton, even in the same circumstances, Kate could have borne it.

As it was, she felt impelled to speak, to question Gervase, to do something, anything, to make things clear. The need of an explanation laid itself about her heart, and so imperative did it become that it swept away conventional qualms and even the natural fear of being misunderstood. She only saw a man who, for some reason or other, fleshly or spiritual, had fallen below her idea of him.

'And Mirry would do for anybody she lived with,' she decided finally.

Her opportunity came sooner than she had expected. Next day, calling at the Hall to see Mrs.

Willoughby Fairfax about some detail connected with the wedding—poor Emma was not much use in such an event, and Gervase had insisted upon having it at King's Stratton,—Kate found that the lady was out driving ; but, as she turned to go back, Gervase came up to her with quick steps across the lawn. He had been playing lawn-tennis, and looked extraordinarily handsome and radiant, also not particularly unhappy. For a moment Kate hesitated ; it flashed through her mind that this affair was, after all, no business of hers. It would be better for her to return to Paris and her painting, and leave this couple to take care of themselves. But would it ? Even while she questioned, something above mere curiosity, a great yearning to reach the truth and to help her friend, if need were, lifted her above those scruples.

'Will you walk back with me?' she said slowly. 'I don't suppose that we shall meet again for some time.'

'You are returning to Paris?'

'Yes. Next week—afterwards.' The last word made her flinch ; she could not control a sudden twitch of the lips. But he did not see her, he was looking straight in front of him.

It was her nature to plunge straight into the heart of a difficulty, therefore she summoned all her courage to the effort.

'Gervase, I want to say something. I must. Are you quite sure?'

He turned in surprise. 'Of what?'

'Do you love Miriam—enough?'

She saw his shoulders move with a quick jerk,

then a full tide of red swept across his face. Kate knew that no one else in the world would have dared to ask him such a question, but she had always, since their childhood, stood to Gervase in a different relation from other people. His own thought, made manifest, might have thus questioned his action.

'I love her enough to make her my wife, if that is what you mean. But why do you ask?'

'I don't know. I am worried by a horrible misgiving. A kind of'—she laughed nervously—'second sight.'

Gervase was silent. He could not now in loyalty discuss Miriam with any human being.

'Set your mind at rest,' he said quietly. 'I think that I can make her happy.'

'Oh, it isn't *that*. I was thinking of you.'

'Me!'

'Yes, you! You set out to do so much—once—with life I mean. Everybody said so. You weren't like all of us. Well, will Mirry really help you in the life you have chosen for yourself, whatever it is? Ah, do think, consider, before it is too late!'

A smile sprang up in the young man's eyes.

'And supposing that I came to the conclusion that she would not help me—what would you have me do? Run?'

'I don't know,' said Kate desperately. 'It—it might be better.'

'For me to run on our wedding-day and leave her waiting for me at the altar!—do you really think so?

Kate was getting the worst of it; she cast round for a reply. 'It might be better—for her too,' she said after a moment. 'I'd rather be heart-broken for one day than for all the rest of my life, I think.'

'Do you think that Miriam will be heart-broken for all the rest of her life if she marries me?'

Why would he always think of Miriam? Kate had forgotten that she had used her sister as an argument. She drew a hard breath, and struck the truth.

'I know she won't,' she said; 'she'll be as happy as the day is long—at your expense.' She stopped his reply with, 'There, I'm sorry, Gervase! I've made a fool of myself. Please forgive me. Somehow when I'm with you I am obliged to tell you all I think.'

She looked straight into his eyes, and met there a world of kindness.

'I know. I understand.'

'When did you not?'

'It was very good of you to—be anxious. The thing was complicated, but—well, Mirry won't regret.'

'I'm sure of it. Say that you forgive me.'

He held out his hand frankly and kindly. 'How odd to think that the day after to-morrow you will be my sister.'

'Yes,' she smiled. For the first time she armed herself against him, and dissimulated. 'I never had a brother.' But that last phrase capped all, to her mind. 'Good-bye,' she said again over her shoulder. 'I must hurry back.'

As she went she wondered what madness had prompted her questioning. 'Run,' indeed! She was inclined to run on her own account now—run, and leave Mirry to be married without any bridesmaid at all. No, as Gervase had pointed out, people do not 'run,' even if they have made mistakes; she must see the thing through to the end.

Mirry won't repent! 'I shouldn't think she would,' said Kate to herself. 'It isn't likely that she'd want to change places with any one!'

Then falling into a habit of childhood, she admonished herself to drop dreaming and get back to work. And yet suppose—suppose she had by some strange chance found herself in Mirry's place! The thought struck at her heart with such a sudden depth of pain, that unsuspected things deep down in her stirred as though from sleep. She did not know why, but she felt as though she had been wounded by an unseen knife.

When she got back she found Miriam waiting for her. The girl smiled curiously.

'Where have you been?'

'To the Hall, to see Mrs. Willoughby Fairfax; she was out.'

'What have you been doing? You look so tired.'

'Doing! Nothing.'

'Did you see Gervase?'

'He walked home with me.'

'I know he did. I was on the upper path. I watched you for most of the way.'

'Then why did you ask if I had seen him?'

'To hear what you'd say. You two looked just like lovers. I saw you stand still and say good-bye. Then you bent down your head and ran; you looked as though you were crying.'

There was a pause, and then Kate spoke coldly. 'Have you done romancing?' The whip had restored her pride, she felt herself the match now for a dozen Miriams. 'Is there anything else?'

'No, only that if I were in love with a man who didn't belong to me, and who didn't want me, I'd——'

But Miriam never finished that sentence, for Kate had pinioned her; she held her tight against the cottage door. 'Apologise!' she said peremptorily, 'or I'll go back to Paris to-night and leave your wedding to take care of itself!'

'Well, you have got a temper!'

'Apologise!'

'Oh, all right. I suppose I oughtn't to have said that.'

'No, you ought not. And now if we are to live these next few days peaceably, there is only one thing to do—consider it unsaid. I accept your apology.'

So saying she walked up the stairs and into her own room with her head in the air, while Miriam subsided into the little dining-room, where Emma was busy stitching at the never-ending trousseau. Kate heard the hum of her voice as she complained to Emma of her sister's conduct. 'So like old times!' thought the girl. 'Thank God I got out of it.' But she did not care now. She had found

her line of conduct. Life had suddenly become clear to her.

Gervase spent most of the day before his wedding in Miriam's company. But late in the afternoon he returned to the cottage with a jeweller's case; it contained a pearl pendant, a copy of the old one he had given to his bride. Custom dictated a present to the bridesmaid, but Kate did not wear much jewellery, and somehow he could not think of her in anything else but this; he associated her with it in his mind, for she had been so delighted with the grace and delicacy of the little trinket. Considering the passage of arms between the sisters at the time when it was presented, Miriam had taken Gervase's proposal to copy her pendant as a gift for Kate most amiably; now when the moment had come to present it she just as amiably announced that Kate was nowhere to be found. Even Emma did not know where she was.

'In the woods, perhaps,' said Mrs. Souls uncertainly; 'Kate's got rather a fancy for wandering about by herself. She always was strong-minded, and not dull in her own company, you know. But why ever didn't you say when you were coming down, Gervase? She'd have been in fast enough then.'

'It doesn't matter,' replied the young man, although his tone betrayed a certain disappointment; 'I only came down to give her this. Perhaps you will do it for me.'

But walking back in the half-light he reflected

that for some time now he had seen scarcely anything of Kate; in fact he had not seen her since the day when he had declined to 'run.' He began to search for a reason. Could it be that he had hurt her by his churlishness? He hoped not. He never thought of his words in talking to Kate, for she always understood him; but he knew now, in trying to account for her absence, that he would do almost anything rather than displease her. Was it because she was displeased that she kept away? He could not answer the question, and he could not put it from him. It annoyed, but persisted. It was like an importunate fly that pursued him at intervals during the evening, which he spent in putting his papers in order, and preparing generally for his journey on the following day.

As night fell it was there again, and with it came other thoughts more harassing, more insistent. The grey dawn was in the sky, and the first birds were calling to each other before Gervase finally closed his eyes; and then it was only his body that lay still, his mind was yet at strife with itself.

A certain monkishness in him, fostered by his training, recoiled from the ferment of passion in which it found itself inextricably bound; he was like a man who might with advantage have cut himself in half, each half standing for a whole and complete expression of character. At this moment, in spite of all he had read on the subject, in prose and poetry, it was inconceivable to him that the flesh could in any circumstances stand as the

embodiment of an inward light, for to Gervase Alleyne, love—the unifying of soul and body, the atonement as it were of the whole man—was as yet a closed book. Passion had burnt him, and although in one mood he gloried in the fulfilment of his manhood, in another he shrank from something which, although sanctioned by the Church, seemed to him in its turbulence and grip to destroy his noblest aspirations. And in another mood still he laughed at the absurdity—the ridiculous painful humour of the whole warfare. He thought of that old monk who by the law of his Church was forced to regard marriage as a sacrament, and who yet, in his opinion, and by virtue of his own asceticism, pronounced it to be 'rather a wicked sacrament.' Gervase saw the mordant humour of such a position, but as yet he did not realise what it was in life that this man had missed. Because so far Gervase had not met with love. So far, he knew nothing of that god—that austere Eros who will demand the best, the very best, of man or of woman; and who, even at the price of happiness, will accept no less. This Eros holds between his hands another flame, a divine fire that burns away the dross of the flesh, and purges it from all stain, until its passion is but a symbol of the highest unity.

But Fate, always cynically dramatic, or God working on a set purpose, call the power what you will, had withheld from our young man this knowledge, until the time came when the veil which blinded him to his own undoing might be drawn aside,—and that oddly enough by the

smallest of incidents, the fact of Kate's absence from the cottage when he had called. Why had she stayed away? for that she had stayed away deliberately he was positive. And that question brought with it another, a further probing into Kate's motives and his own. Kate disapproved of this marriage, in spite of being own sister to the bride—he saw that much; but what did she think of marriage in general, and what would her behaviour be like when her time came? The thought brought with it a stab of pain; he pushed it from him and tried to sleep; but once formulated, he had given it life, and the thing pervaded him.

His brain, working on the events of the past fortnight, was no doubt responsible for it; but, however that might be, from among the flitting ghost-like impressions that arise in repose from the subconscious region of the mind, there came suddenly to Gervase a realisation of what seemed to be a picture, and yet a picture that was a part of himself. He was wide awake; the thing that came to him was only a mental image taking form rather than words, and yet clear enough to his inner vision. He imagined himself in church and at his prayers. There was no need to pray for light, for he felt the presence of God as near to him as his own body. At his side there knelt a woman in whose presence there was a great peace, a sense of eternal rest. She did not lift her face for she was also praying; but even without looking he could see the sweet kind eyes, the tremulous tender mouth, and the golden light

which always to his thinking surrounded her. His thoughts drifted back across the years to the day when as a little boy he had first seen her. 'Kate must be the Princess,' he had said then, 'because she is so pretty.' Later, in a sudden dazzling moment, she had flashed again into his life. How well he remembered his first journey to Oxford! But even then, even after he had bade her good-bye and sat alone in the railway carriage, he had not known that he loved her. Love had been a curious, fitful, tentative thing in those days, disturbed by new impressions, banished for a time by new friendships and new faces; and yet it had all along been—love. He saw now how all the sweetness, the light, the laughter of his life had gone to make it; how all the tears, the agony, the loneliness, the prayers were needed somehow to give it strength; the interpretation of the past, the fair promise of the future lay about that quiet form at his side. He saw it all now—that was why God had made them from the beginning, man and woman.

O well is thee, and happy shalt thou be.
Thy wife shall be as the fruitful vine: upon the walls of thine house;
Thy children like the olive branches: round about thy table.
Lo, thus shall the man be blessed: that feareth the Lord.

Then he roused himself deliberately. This half sleep into which he had fallen had become intolerable, a thing scarcely to be borne.

He had determined to get up and dress before

he realised that it was full morning. A peal of bells came to him across the trees.

At the sound his throat contracted and a horror of great emptiness fell upon him. It was his wedding morning.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE TRAP

'WHAT would you have me do? Run?' Gervase's mouth twisted into a bitter smile as he remembered that conversation a few days back. 'Run on our wedding-day, and leave her waiting for me at the altar!' It had seemed almost a joke then, but now—a thing only too possible. And yet, brides had been known to run on their wedding-day! But not bridegrooms: there was no male equivalent for the 'fair Ellen of young Lochinvar.' So Gervase ate his breakfast, tied his tie with special care, and arrayed himself in the inevitable frock-coat. He handed over to his best man his last wedding present, a small gold box made to hold the wedding-ring. This came from Jack Denham, whose congratulations the cynically disposed might have described as the most heart-felt of any that Gervase had hitherto received. Denham had written tactfully the moment the news reached him, regretting at the same time that a continental journey must inevitably debar him from being present at the wedding.

The sun shone triumphantly over the ferment,

the bubble and squeak of the wedding-day. King's Stratton and the neighbourhood was prepared to enjoy itself to the utmost. Even Mrs. Willoughby Fairfax, in the infectious excitement of the moment, lost sight of her regret and shed tears from entirely pleasurable motives. The reception took place in a marquee that had been erected just inside the Park Gates; for any entertaining at Emma's cottage was naturally out of the question. Mrs. Willoughby Fairfax had so far stifled her polite feelings as to advise that lady —of whose existence she had hitherto professed herself unaware—as to the right methods of procedure, and Emma was ready for the first time to exchange her visionary Past for an equally brilliant and more tangible Present. In a dress afterwards described by the local paper as a 'faille of vieux rose colour with sleeves and motifs of a darker shade,' the widow of Captain Henry Jason Arthur Souls received the county. She rose to the event; her composure was superb; she satisfied even Mrs. Willoughby Fairfax. The presents were on view in another tent, and for those who missed the sight, their number and description was faithfully set forth in the local paper.

Only one little episode happened during the ceremony, and that, so everybody said, was a very natural and pathetic one, adding to the human interest of the occasion. The bride fainted. But her husband and sister, both sympathetically pale, succeeded without any undue fussiness or waste of time in restoring her to consciousness. After that, all went as merrily as the bells.

'For better for worse, indeed!' said Mrs Savile, treading on Lady Brereton's heels in her haste to get out of church; 'better for her, no doubt, but worse for him; richer for her, poorer for him; but, if you ask me, I don't believe we shall have to wait for death to part them!'

'Hush,' said Lady Brereton gently, 'they are man and wife now.' But even as she said it there were tears in her eyes, for she had loved Mary Alleyne, and her thoughts had dropped back to the day when she had been bridesmaid to Gervase's mother.

But the thing was settled now, settled irrevocably. No man, except at the risk of the wrath of God or the penalties of Society, might put this pair asunder. Mr. Money had recognised that and had made his peace with Gervase.

But in the evening, when it was all over, he let himself go with his usual volubility to Mark Hassall, who dined with him. Gervase's old tutor had come over to King's Stratton for the wedding, and was for one night staying at the Hall, the guest of Mrs. Willoughby Fairfax.

'Poor Gervase! I couldn't save him!' said the Rector sadly. He sat in his study smoking with Hassall after dinner. 'I offered to put in a *locum tenens* here and elope with him to Japan. I've wanted to go to Japan ever since I went to town years ago to see the Mikado. But he wouldn't do it.'

'The whole thing is very mysterious,' returned Hassall. 'She is the last woman I should have expected him to fall in love with.'

But Mr. Money did not agree with him.

'My dear fellow, the whole thing is as open to the heavens as a duck-pond. Gervase wanted to convert the lovely Miriam; it was her spiritual state which interested him—at first.'

'And then——'

'Then—that went the way of the usual platonic friendship! She knew it would—the Boots! But in the end it was duty that finished him.'

'Duty!'

'Yes. He thought that he had compromised her—also that she pined. King's Stratton said—both. It takes a lot of the credit of the match to itself, and well it may! Did you ever know a place come dancing out more jubilantly to see a man hanged? Poor old Gervase, he was so set on heaven, and now he has made the worst of both worlds after all! He's got the cross now with a vengeance, without the crown! Martyrdom indeed! Do you know once——'

But Mark Hassall did not wait to hear the story of the lupins. The cheerful familiarity with which Mr. Money commented on Gervase irritated him beyond measure. Composed of coarser fibre, the Rector of King's Stratton would never understand the particular quality of the young man's mind, or what it was exactly that had gone to make up this extraordinary piece of foolishness.

Hassall therefore made his farewells and retraced his steps to the Hall, where he found Mrs. Willoughby Fairfax in the act of bidding her guests good-night.

He occupied his usual bedroom, which he had

had since the first night of his arrival at the Hall; and he now pulled out his usual arm-chair and settled himself down to read. He knew that he would not sleep, and indeed he found reading something of a difficulty, for his mind was fixed irrevocably upon this lad whom he had trained and educated. The book lay open upon his lap, and more than half an hour had passed before he had even turned a page. Gervase seemed to be extraordinarily near to him. He could not tell why, but he experienced an ever-increasing perturbation of soul, a strange anxiety, from which he could not free himself. It may have been that the atmosphere of the house in which he had passed so many happy and fruitful years had laid hold upon him. He could not tell. The days passed at King's Stratton had been days of prayer and peace, in which he had walked very near to God; now it seemed as though he were called upon to do battle for—he knew not what. He grew annoyed with himself. Imagination resulting from a heated state of the brain was his especial abhorrence—the thing he was most severe upon, both in himself and others. He applied himself to his book—a work on Christian mysticism—and yet he could not shake off the obsession. An hour passed, two hours, and then he laid it down with a sigh. He had been reading much about the inward light of the soul; perhaps this very stress of spirit against which he struggled was the result of a perception of which he was only half aware, some knowledge of a hidden world, a fourth dimension, of which he could not even conceive.

However this may have been, he found that with the same anxiety there came also a quickening of spiritual perception; it was the moment for prayer, and prayer that centred about his boy. It seemed to him now as though Gervase had actually set in motion certain vibrations which, extending slowly in ever-widening ripples, had at last reached his consciousness. He knew himself now, beyond a doubt, to be in touch, in communion with his friend. He threw down the book and paced his bedroom in a kind of exaltation. Suddenly a clock struck; Mark Hassall stood still and listened, for he had had no notion of the passage of time. He counted twelve strokes, then he opened his bedroom door. Silence lay heavy on the sleeping house. He passed down the corridor until he came to Gervase's room. The blind was up and the moonlight fell upon the little narrow bed, the crucifix, and Mr. Sponge. Mark Hassall dropped upon his knees and prayed.

Wareham had invited Gervase to make use of Wick for his honeymoon, since Lord Corfe was at this moment in Scotland. This gave the local paper an opportunity of glorifying the lord and of describing Wick, which it did from the guide-book, in an extra sheet, to everybody's satisfaction.

'To this earthly paradise,' it concluded, 'the happy couple have repaired; the bride a dream of loveliness, and the bridegroom (God bless him!) as noble a specimen of English manhood as ever walked the earth.'

Thus, through the blare and noise of the wedding, the turmoil of guests, bouquets, wedding favours, presents, and congratulations, passed Gervase with his bride upon his arm. He had shut his mind inevitably to the past, guillotined it, as it were, and now he looked forward, not without faith, to the future. Charity, as he grasped the kind hands of many friends, was already his, and, now that he had accepted life as it had come to him, striving only to remedy a great mistake, hope also. God, and the law, stood now predominant. Once more he saw the heavenly vision, and once more he prayed that it might be for ever his. Even in the dawn of his wedding-day he had realised that this marriage was not in any sense fulfilment, but sacrifice; and in that knowledge there had returned to him inevitably the strength which comes only through renunciation.

From this detached standpoint he surveyed his bride, and indeed, as he looked at Miriam to-day, there was little in her to quarrel with. She seemed to him now to be most beautiful. Her face, sometimes too heavy and too full of colour, was blanched to an ivory whiteness, her cheeks fell in delicate curves, swept by the black lashes of her downcast eyes. Tearful, startled, unconscious of herself, she made an undeniable appeal. Also, Gervase saw with an unexpected pleasure that she did not take the least interest in the impression she produced, was unaware of her veil, her train, her orange blossom. She clung to him in a kind of fear as though she needed protection from all

the crowding, curious faces that surrounded her. Gervase felt a new sense of proprietorship: here was some one out of all the world who belonged to him, and who needed him as she needed no other.

But Miriam's fainting fit had shaken her, and she did not seem to be able to throw off the weakness that remained. During the journey she sat huddled up in a corner of the railway carriage. Gervase, alone with his wife for the first time, found her lips chilly and her fingers lifeless.

'What is the matter, dear Miriam?' he asked in some anxiety.

'I hated it so—that awful wedding!' The words came slowly at first, but ended in a sudden rush. 'I didn't know! I didn't know!' Tears stopped her speech.

Gervase was puzzled. He had not credited Miriam with this depth of feeling, and it roused all his tenderness; he soothed her as a mother might soothe a frightened child.

'There, there, don't cry—don't talk! It has been a tiring day. I felt it myself, and of course it was worse for you. There! There!' Again he kissed and comforted her.

She sat quietly for some time resting her head against his shoulder and shedding occasional tears, and as the train rushed past villages and woods and rivers, Gervase looked over the crown of dark hair so near his cheek, and wondered. He told himself that this behaviour was only natural, a young girl on her wedding-day must needs be nervous and full of fears. It was the moment for especial tenderness on his part. And yet, he had

expected something else—an emotion which might have lifted her above any sense of fear, a passion that would have left no room for self-consciousness.

And then the sense of her nearness crept upon him, until he forgot to wonder at her sudden coldness, but only desired to wake in her the same passion which was now stirring in his blood. He held her to him as he had held her in the wood-walk, and kissed her as he had kissed her then, on lips and eyes and hair.

But this time there was no answering thrill in Miriam. Her tears only flowed afresh, until, finding that he was making her the more unhappy, Gervase returned to his old brooding over a coldness which might possibly in the circumstances be natural, but which he found it difficult to understand. So he drew away from her and sat silent waiting for her to make some sign.

Gradually Miriam began to revive. Her tears had done her good, for it was principally the unaccustomed restraint that had worn her out. By degrees she began to talk naturally to Gervase, and by the time that they had reached the little station for Wick she seemed to have recovered herself.

Now it was Gervase who felt the need of effort. A carriage was waiting for them, and, seated there by Miriam's side, he pointed out various objects of interest as they drove along—the growth and greenery of a clump of stone pines, the tints of the changing leaves, the purple mists of distance. And he found Miriam able to respond to him; she drank in the keener air of this new country in a kind of relief. She asked questions about

Wick, and Gervase was glad to answer her. He talked of his friend Wareham, who, in some unaccountable way, never seemed to grow any older, and of Lord Corfe and his politics, until at last the lodge gates were reached. Here Miriam drew back wearily as the pleasant-faced woman curtsied to them.

'It's not a bit like Weybourne,' she said in a disappointed tone, 'or King's Stratton either. I think it's all very ugly.'

But Gervase told himself that his bride knew as little of country houses as of London drawing-rooms, and, rather than criticise her taste, he was content to admire the shadow cast by her dark lashes upon her cheeks. They therefore drove on in silence until they reached the house.

Here Miriam was assured that her maid—that newly-acquired and terrifying treasure—would really look after her luggage, and that the only thing that was required of her was to go up to the rooms that had been got ready for her and rest until dinner.

As she passed down the long corridor she slipped her hand into her husband's arm.

'I shall never feel at home in this place, Gervase,' she said, shivering ; 'I wish we had gone to lodgings at the seaside.'

But he patted the little gloved hand reassuringly. 'You don't know yet how beautiful it is here, Mirry. You wait.' He smiled and nodded to her as he might have done to a little child. 'And we've got it all to our two selves.'

A set of rooms in the old part of the house

had been prepared for them, and here the dark panelling and the old stained glass chilled Miriam afresh.

But Gervase drew her to the window and tried to interest her in the matchless view of the Abbey ruins which was obtained from this wing. Then he explained the arrangement of the building. Here was the Refectory, which was joined to the church by the ruined cloisters. Away on the right the old gateway with its mullioned windows still stood, and beyond they could see the long roof of the tithe barn.

'The rooms where we are,' he said, 'were part of the Abbot's house, which was built when monasteries were rich and comfortable. It wasn't comfortable enough though for Lord Corfe's ancestors, and so Sir Thomas Egdon built the Elizabethan south wing, and another Egdon added the Georgian front that you saw when we came in.'

Miriam looked as he directed, apparently listening, yet her eyes saw nothing. Discovering this, Gervase stopped short in his descriptions. How strange she was; she baffled him more now than ever before! However, he attributed her abstraction to extreme nervousness and implored her to rest for a while before dinner, to which suggestion, when she realised that it implied his leaving her, she was quite ready to accede. Without another word she turned to her bedroom, where the new maid (almost as awful a person in Miriam's eyes as the butler who received them) was busy with her clothes. Here, once more, she

stopped short and stared. The old carved four-post bedstead, unlike anything she had ever seen before, filled her with panic. But the presence of the maid restrained her: without another word she allowed herself to be divested of her travelling dress, and arrayed in a lace wrapper that Kate had made for her. Then, with the maid's help and a stool, she climbed up into the gigantic bed, and once there lay motionless. Her eyes were shut and her mouth set firmly, as though pulled together by the endurance of some sharp pain. She would not let the maid leave her. 'I shall rest better if you remain here,' she said, and tears sounded in her voice: 'I—am not at all well. I—am very very tired.' So when the delicate dress was folded and the other garments unpacked and put away, the woman sat down quietly with folded hands and looked out of the window at the park and the great bare stretch of country beyond. It is possible that she speculated to some extent concerning her new mistress.

Later when Gervase came up to inquire for her, he found Miriam already dressed for dinner. She stood at the door waiting for him.

'I would have come down,' she said, 'only I didn't know where you were, or where the dining-room was; and I'—she hesitated, but the maid had left her and she was free to speak—'was afraid of meeting all those servants, dressed like this, you know.'

Gervase laughed and kissed his wife. Then he contemplated her critically. She was still pale,

but very exquisite in her ivory satin, and she wore round her neck the original of Kate's pearl pendant. Certainly Miriam was a very beautiful woman; there was about her a certain queenliness that Gervase was very far from despising.

The girl bent her dark head and looked at her skirts.

'She put me out a dinner-party dress, Gervase,' she said, pulling down her mouth; 'was that right?'

'Is it a dinner-party dress?' he asked, smiling. He stood still staring at her. 'Whatever it is, you look—glorious!'

But to-night Miriam was proof even against admiration. 'I think it's very extravagant to wear a dinner-party dress every day,' she answered. 'I shouldn't think even a millionaire could afford that.' To-night at least it was evident that her beauty gave her no pleasure.

He led her down the long corridor and wide silent staircase into the little room, near to the great dining-hall, where dinner awaited them. Miriam held herself with dignity, but she had clearly not recovered from the emotions of the afternoon. To-night Gervase found conversation with her more difficult than ever before. Later he became aware of a certain shrinking in her attitude that further bewildered him, so unaccountable did it seem, in the light of all that had passed before; also tears, which had flowed so freely earlier in the day, now seemed to be still there, but held back by some effort of will contrary to Mirry's nature. Gervase was both hurt and

puzzled. This Miriam, his wife, sitting opposite to him in pearls and ivory satin, seemed to be an entirely different being from the Miriam whom he had once taught in the wood-walk. Not only was her outward aspect altered, but her soul also it seemed had undergone a change. The very tone of her voice was different. That strange haunted look that had suddenly dropped upon her some time ago had returned : it was the same expression that had brought to Gervase's mind the mediæval notion of possession. There was little of the 'Boots,' the laughing, black-eyed Miriam, here.

She ate very little, and with every moment that passed, her uneasiness seemed to increase.

When the servants had left and they were at last alone, silence reigned, pervading the room and filling all things with heaviness. Miriam sat playing with some sweets in her plate and struggling with tears.

At last Gervase could bear it no longer.

'My dear, what is the matter?'

'I don't know. I can't tell. I'm — I'm nervous. I feel ill to-night, Gervase. You will forgive me!'

'Forgive you!' He felt a quick pain mixed with pity for this girl whose future happiness lay in his hands. 'I'm only so sorry for you, darling! Weddings are trying things—just made for guests and relations; they ought not to be allowed.'

'No,' she shivered, 'they ought not to be allowed. Would you mind'—her manner was deprecating—'leaving me for a time?'

'You are not ill?'

'No, not exactly, only tired, and—very strange, and lonely.' Her lips quivered, and now two tears impossible to restrain dropped from her eyes. Gervase drew her towards him.

'Dearest, you ought not to feel lonely now with me—you are my wife.'

'Yes, yes—I know. I won't—soon. It's only for a moment, at first. Please leave me for a little while—an hour. Then I shall be all right.'

'Not frightened of me, do you mean?'

'Yes, yes, not frightened of you.'

He would have kissed her, but again with a sudden movement, disproportionately violent, she wrenched herself away.

'Don't kiss me—not now. I—I can't bear it.'

Then he gave himself up to perplexity.

'I will come and see how you are in an hour.'

'Yes, yes, in an hour.'

Turning, she left him, and he followed her through the room to the foot of the stairs. Then he stood still and watched her. On the top step she turned and smiled a faint quivering smile; he likened it to a gleam of sunshine on a winter's day. How different she was from the Miriam of full summer, who held about her the warmth of sun-kissed poppies and the exuberance of ripe cornfields!

With a sigh he turned back into the vestibule, and paused for a moment to look out at the garden, flooded with moonlight. He knew it all so well with its yew hedges and little terraces. That was the path he had trodden with Lady

Sarah Beverley on a night long ago when they had discoursed of love and of marriage. He felt a great desire to walk along it now. He turned and went down the great dining-room, which would remain swathed in winding sheets until the return of what Miriam called the 'family.' The shutters were up here so he could not reach the garden this way. He stood still and looked at the room for a moment. His imagination lighted and filled it with the people he had met when he was an Oxford undergraduate. How dazzling it had seemed then, and its occupants how brilliant! Would Miriam, his wife, ever hold her own in such an assembly? With a quick movement he turned and retraced his steps, arriving eventually through a gallery to a French window, which opened from the inner hall. He passed through it and looked about him. The moonlight lay upon everything. A flying Mercury caught it on his caduceus; dropped, it was washed in new silver by the water in the marble basin underneath, where every now and then there darted a sleepless gold-fish.

Gervase felt extraordinarily lonely. Never before in his whole life, not even when a little boy at Eton, had loneliness entered into his soul with such poignancy. He stood, under this miracle of moonlight, apart from all mankind; giving, it is true, but receiving nothing from any human being; more solitary than an anchorite in the wilderness who peopled the desert places with his saints and angels. And this was his wedding night! But he was not free to conjure up happier possibilities. How strange! How far removed is fact from the

foreshadowings of youth, how different is fulfilment to promise.

He paced up and down the paved walks where tiny scented herbs—thyme and marjoram—grew in the crevices. He looked down at the low-growing beds of autumn flowers and noticed casually how moonlight absorbs all colour, so that against the hedge even flaming gladioli and red-hot tritomas had become grey as ashes, and roses mere white flickering ghosts. The hedges themselves had surrendered their heavy greenery, looking like banks of mist, while distant trees were nothing more than patches of veiled darkness. A heavy night-moth lumbered past him, testifying to at least one wakefulness ; but in spite of that, and of the darting gold-fish, everything, it seemed, was dreaming.

Suddenly, involuntarily, Gervase started. A white figure flitted in front of him, and his nerves had grown aware of the apparition before his reason had awakened to tell him that it was only Miriam. She still wore her white dress ; but she had thrown a lace scarf about her head. She came forward quickly with a sort of gliding motion peculiarly her own ; and when he realised her presence with all his faculties he was conscious chiefly of a quick thrill that pervaded him. She had evidently seen him walking to and fro from her window, and perhaps she was contrite for her abrupt departure.

'Dearest,' he began eagerly, but her explanation cut him short.

'I—I can't manage the electric light, Gervase,'

she said. She seemed to have entirely regained her self-possession. 'That contraption on the dressing-table, I mean. Something must be wrong with it. I thought that I should never find you,' she continued somewhat querulously. 'I must have walked miles in this awful place.'

'But why on earth didn't you ring for what's-her-name—your maid?'

'Because, if it really is all right, she would have thought me such a fool for not knowing how to work it, don't you see! Besides, I didn't want her. I think I've taken a dislike to her. She stares so. Do come and see to it for me.'

Without a word, Gervase followed her into the house. The light was soon adjusted, and by its sudden glare Gervase saw that the girl had grown once more fearful and apologetic. He hated to see her in such a condition; it was insupportable. But what did it all mean? Here it seemed he touched something that was outside his powers of comprehension—a mystery. The conviction grew upon him with such force that the beads of perspiration stood out upon his forehead. What did it all mean? He was alone now with his bride in the bride-chamber, and yet she warded off his presence with outstretched imploring hands.

He was too puzzled, too sick at heart, even to feel resentment.

'Shall I ring for your maid now?' he asked her quietly.

'No, no, not now! I must—I must be alone! You said an hour.'

Her manner was distraught, her air appealing; in spite of himself Gervase pitied her.

'My dear, you are very tired. I don't quite understand what it is that is troubling you. I will leave you now. Get a good sleep. I——'

'No, no, no.' The old fire leapt in her eyes, but with a difference. 'Come to me in an hour. You *must!* An hour, do you hear! I have something to say!'

'Very well, I will come in an hour.'

He shut the door quickly and returned to the garden.

CHAPTER XIX

THE TRAP CLOSES

During that hour in which Gervase paced the garden at Wick there was war in his soul.

All the contending forces that had gone to bring about the present state of things seemed to be now at their strongest. And where between them all was the will of Gervase? It had become an agency capable of abetting, to the soul's agony, first one set of passions, and then the opposite. The long denial had brought an unappeasable primitive hunger. After all he was a man, and as a man he demanded his just rights. Still, he might be fire, but this woman whom he had wedded was undoubtedly ice. It seemed impossible from what had happened that he could ever find her warm, alive, and thrilling in his arms. And with that thought there came a devastating fury. How weak were all the resolutions of the past, all the prayers, all the promises that he had ever made to contend with a mood like this. He had thought in the early morning that he was marrying Miriam from duty. That was true, but it was duty urged by desire, and in such a case duty

becomes very plain and very importunate. At the last moment could he have done so without disgrace, he would have turned back ; but honour barred him, and he was forced to proceed. And now that desire had met with a rebuff, duty had degenerated for him into a kind of Quixotic madness. 'Fool! Fool! Fool!' sounded in his ears.

And all the time at the back of this turmoil there was stirring the old ideal, the old cry for peace, and for the vision of heaven vouchsafed only to the single-hearted. The single-hearted! Uplifted by the light of a single ideal, how easy to fight with beasts, how easy to die! But how hard to hold the balance, to be even commonly temperate and just, when the soul is riddled by an internecine war.

Then Gervase began to reason with himself. He would not attempt to explain Miriam's conduct, but he would go to her and would as her lover woo her to him. Perhaps after all this was only some revulsion natural in a woman! Yet instinct told him that nature could not account for such entire lack, not only of answer to his passion, but of tenderness or kindness.

Thus the minutes passed irrevocably to the striking of the new hour ; and Gervase, his hands shaking, his body vibrating, knocked at the door of his wife's room.

There was no answer.

Could Miriam be asleep? Impossible, and yet no light came through the cracks of the door ; that and the passage beyond, save for a flickering

light that showed from the ante-room, were shrouded in thick darkness.

Suddenly there came to his ears the sound of a low breathy sobbing—the noise of some animal in distress. He recognised it, and all the fears that had racked him that night in the woods were upon him again.

'Mirry,' he said, 'it is I—Gervase! May I come in?'

This time he did not wait for her reply, but pushed the door open. The room was quite dark, but the sound of that sobbing was louder now and more distinct.

He did not know what he had expected to find, but at that reiterated complaint all his emotion rose to an intense irritability.

'Where are you?' he said sharply. 'What are you doing in the dark?'

As he spoke he moved impatiently to turn up the light. The glare that followed blinded him by its suddenness, but blinking, he made out the figure of his wife crouched in a corner of the room, a dishevelled heap of lace and ivory satin. At the sight of her his mixed emotions rose only to a sudden criticism. That attitude, whatever its cause, was like Miriam; she was always theatrical, and to-night, for some reason or another, she elected to play a tragic part.

'What is the matter with you, my dear?' he said as kindly as he could; but for the life of him he could not prevent an angry coldness in his tone. He pushed forward a chair. 'Sit here. Be comfortable, anyhow. There is nothing to be

frightened of. I have offered already to leave you, if you had rather I did so.'

There was no reply from Miriam, only a sudden access of hysterical sobbing.

Then feeling it to be a necessity, Gervase spoke sternly: 'You must get up, Miriam, or I shall have to ring for your maid. I can't leave you in this state.'

The peremptory words had the effect of staying the girl's tears. She rose slowly to her feet and dropped into the chair that Gervase pointed out. Her eyes were still blurred, although her mouth had dropped into its old expression of dogged sulkiness.

'Oh, well,' she said, once more articulate, 'it's easier if you are going to take it like that!'

He sat opposite to her, leaning forward. 'Take it like that! What in God's name are you talking about?'

'About what I've got to tell you!' She paused, and then with a burst of quick passion, 'I can't go through with it. I can't. I've not got the strength. It's not only for to-day but for every day—that's the thing. That awful wedding knocked the starch out of me. I don't want the money or the position now. I don't care how mother raves. I'd rather die than stop here. I've made up my mind.'

Suddenly Gervase laughed. There was no denying the ironic humour of the situation, and the over-tension of his nerves made him doubly quick to see it. He laughed from very bitterness of heart. Here he sat on his wedding night contending with a weeping unwilling woman

whom he did not love. Pushing back his chair he stood up.

'Suppose we continue this conversation in the morning?' he said sternly. 'You are overdone now, and I think that you hardly know what you are talking about.'

He would have moved to the door, but Miriam's outstretched hands caught at his coat.

'No, no,' she said excitedly, 'that's not all! You must listen—you must, you must! If you won't I shall go mad!'

Her voice rose to a high shriek, and, in a disgust that showed itself by an added coldness, Gervase turned.

'If you can talk quietly I will listen—only be quick.'

When she saw that he intended to remain, her sobs gradually lessened.

'I could have gone through with it if I'd had the nerve,' she reiterated; 'but I haven't. I thought I should have died this afternoon.'

He resigned himself to the inevitable and humoured her. 'Gone through with what?'

'This marriage, of course,—and the rest—what I've got to tell you.'

'Yes, yes, this marriage and the rest—what you've got to tell me.' All the bitterness of his wrecked happiness sounded in the young man's voice.

Miriam began again with a question.

'Look here now—tell me straight—man to woman—this isn't a time for palavering! Tell me straight, before you met me—read books with

me and all that, I mean—there must have been some other girl, wasn't there? You were twenty-five—there must have been!'

For a moment Gervase could not reply; the question had stirred the ground that lay about the roots of his life, and with that stirring there came a sudden uprush of old dreams, old hopes, old faiths—dreamt, hoped for, and believed in the glory of a light immortal.

'Yes, I was twenty-five, but—there was no one; you were the first woman. I had a hard boyhood, I was taught to follow a great ideal—but you wouldn't understand.'

'I understand, any way, that if it's like that you won't forgive me. Only I know, jolly well too, that you won't understand me, or how anything happened.'

He looked at her with blank eyes that cleared slowly. He did at last begin to understand, and also the reason why she had asked him that question. There could be only one explanation, and that, he knew now, he had been long in finding.

'I have been curiously dense!' She detected the new note in his voice. 'You mean that you——'

'That's it. Don't say any more! I'm not asking you to forgive me, mind.'

'No, you must give me time.'

Miriam stared. His manner of receiving her news—or a part of her news—was as strange as all the rest of him. 'He isn't a man,' she said to herself; 'he's just a prig.' She felt that he

had not seen the possible conclusion of her confession.

'That's not all,' she added abruptly, 'it often isn't—with the woman. Oh,' she blazed once more into passion, 'don't go staring at me like that! Don't look so awful. Of course it isn't all! If it had been I could have stood it. But what's the good of talking?'

'I have at last grasped your meaning. It has been very difficult—or I have been extraordinarily obtuse. You married me because you wanted a name for your child that is to be born, and you thought that mine would do! Was that it?'

'Yes, I suppose so. I was nearly out of my mind. I am now. I'd kill myself for twopence. You don't know what it means to be left with—that.' She cried quickly. Then she went on talking in jerks. 'The awful awfulness of it. At first you can't believe it, it seems so queer and impossible. Everything goes on just the same, but you're just a bit different; and there's no one to tell. You howl yourself to sleep at nights, and in the morning—there it is waiting for you! You look at yourself in the glass and you're just the same, but you're different too; and you know that the time is going—going, and nothing will stop it. And one day you'll be differenter still, and then everybody will look queer at you—and everybody will know that a man took his pleasure of you and walked away. And then there's the pain to come, and worse than the pain, the fear, the awful fear. You'd catch at anything—anything to save yourself. When men are drowning on a raft I expect

they push each other into the sea to save their own lives. I pushed you into the sea, that's what I did. I thought if I could only be married it 'ud be all right, and anyway people couldn't hint and sneer, and come nearer and nearer, grinning silent, like they did at me at nights. *You* don't know—only women know these things; and only women who've got what I've got know really. Girls kill their babies because they're afraid of those grinning silent faces crowding down upon them until they've pushed them into the river or the grave!' She stopped, but he had nothing to say to her in reply. 'There, I've talked now and I'm better. I had to say it or die. It wasn't until I was safe that I could think of what I'd done to you. If you'd killed a man from fear, you wouldn't think of what you'd done till he was dead; and when I began to think I couldn't go on. I got afraid in another way. I couldn't see you sitting there—and not tell you. And somehow I don't want the money or the things any more; I only want to get away.'

The torrent of words had exhausted her. She sat pale and trembling. After a moment she got up and poured out a glass of water, holding it to her lips unsteadily.

Gervase watched her, but for the life of him he could not pity her—not yet.

'Does anybody know of this?'

'Nobody.'

'Not your mother?'

'No.'

'And the father of your child?'

'He—he knows nothing.'

'Then the secret rests between you and me?'

'Yes.'

He shut his mind to the tumult of the passions that surged about him, and thus held himself in check. Only once did he open a chink as it were, and then the stupendous nature of the wrong inflicted on him filled him first of all with wonder.

'Can you in any way guess at the meaning of what you have done?'

'Haven't I been talking of the meaning for the last five minutes?'

But from his point of view she had not touched on it; for the truth is, that each of these two people looked at something with such different eyes that the thing itself became to each of them a different thing.

'When will your child be born?'

'In six months. O God, stop talking! It's a mess, that's what it is. Talking won't alter it. I can't stand barging here. I wish you'd go. I can't bear to have you near me.'

'Because you have done me this injury?'

'I expect that's about it.'

Without another word he left her. The facts were clear now, and he would not pay the tribute of reproaches. But he did not understand, and she knew he did not. To him it seemed unconceivable that, having gained her desire—built up her house of shelter to the very roof,—she should turn and shatter it. But then Gervase did not know Miriam—Miriam the victim of the occasion

—Mirry who, as little Kate had said long ago, 'always blabbed.'

And yet the thing seen in another way was not entirely without parallel, and not so rare either. The impulse that stirred poor Miriam to confession was the same that long ago had prompted a greater criminal to return at the triumphant moment of success a certain coveted sum of money, the price of blood. And 'it would have been better for that man if he had never been born.'

Gervase moved instinctively to his own bedroom. He turned up the light and stood by the writing-table, running his fingers along the edge of a small Chinese cabinet that was used as a box for letters. It was a very beautiful piece of inlaid work. He examined it intently. Never before had he realised the essential character of such decoration. Then he put it down and paced the room restlessly ; some restraining impulse forbade him to think ; his brain, strung at a high tension, remained passive.

He scarcely knew what he was doing, but the same blind impulse made him long for the open air. He left his room and walked down a corridor, which he found ended in a door. He opened it, and by the smell of flowers, sweet and sickly, knew that he was in the chapel. He ran his fingers along the wall searching for the switch of the electric light, but not finding it, lit a match. He was right : he was standing in the gallery of the chapel, and below him on the altar, and round the altar steps, were massed lilies ; their scent rose overwhelmingly to where he stood. He turned

on the full light in order to see the reredos, a famous one, a painting of the scene at Emmaus when the two disciples had just begun to recognise their Master in the breaking of bread.

Gervase stood looking at it critically. The thing was extraordinarily alien to his mood. What had this to do with the brutal facts of human life? When he was a child, he had once heard Mr. Money describe to his mother the probable aspect of the Temple at Jerusalem, the Court of the Priests thick with the blood of animals, the bespattered robes, the reek and the filth of sacrifices. Just now some bleeding victim, some red-armed priest, would be more in keeping with his disposition than the gentle Christ, the fearful yet inspired disciples.

The brute in him had revolted; rage, urged by his baffled manhood, dominated him. For a man in this condition the gentle beauty of the chapel had no message; he longed for keen winds, hurricanes, earthquakes, for some war of the elements that was akin to the striving of his own soul.

He turned his back on the painted reredos, and passing swiftly down the corridor and staircase, gained a door. It was bolted, but he wrenched it open, and stood still for one moment to draw a deep breath of the keen autumn air that rushed in upon him. He had reached the other side of the house. Closing the door behind him silently, he sprang down the path and struck out—he did not know in which direction. Then thoughts, those inward voices of his soul, began a confused

hubbub; they rose and fell around him until he walked quicker and quicker, almost running to escape them. By degrees they dropped, and one voice became clear above the rest, the voice of his wrong. Murder cries aloud to God, and surely Miriam was right in her analogy ; this that he had suffered was a kind of killing, but not of himself, of his wife—this was the murder of Gervase Alleyne's wife, the murder of his child. He was left now wifeless and childless perhaps for ever. And indeed this was no melodramatic figure, but the simple truth, for to Gervase the law of his Church was indisputable ; and although he might divorce Miriam, by that law the marriage of divorced persons is a thing prohibited : the innocent and the guilty must suffer alike.

Not so long ago he would have pronounced a light-hearted judgment on such a situation. Then his point of view would have been entirely impersonal. As regards the man, he would have recognised it as a misfortune, a bereavement almost—he could hardly have done otherwise,—a loss ; and yet not one that was irremediable, rather such a loss as that of the right eye and the right hand, which would not close for him the way to heaven. Heaven was the thing that mattered, heaven here and now, the vision of the saints.

But it was not so easy ; his view was coloured by experience, and it was experience that withheld the easy judication. He knew now that in losing so much he had lost half his life ; humanly speaking, he was incomplete, and for the moment he did not care what he was spiritually. He was

not in the mood to consider Hassall's doctrine that all material loss is spiritual achievement, for it had been driven in upon him sharply that the heart of human experience was now denied him, filched from him by a trick. And having lost his share of the world here—not the makeshift half-world that Miriam would have brought him, but the world that was very good, and in which he believed most devoutly that 'the Word was made Flesh'—he did not think it likely that he would recover that loss in any far-off star.

He did not notice where his feet were leading him, but leaving the park he had passed a wicket-gate, and was now upon a moor, purple in the day-time with heather. He was blind with anger and resentment. He felt a fool, and such knowledge to youth has a corroding consequence. 'Be careful, or the Boots will get you!' He could hear those words still—Fool, fool, fool!

Then the sense of his desolation obliterated even anger. A desolate childhood had been his, a hard and (but for Hassall) desolate youth, and now a desolate manhood! Why did God make him a man with human desires and aspirations, if, at every turn, he was to meet with such frustration?

Soon he became aware that he was physically tired. He sat down on a heather-covered mound and held his head in his hands. A few tears trickled from between his fingers—why, he did not know; he had not wept for years! He could not remember the last time; perhaps it was at Eton—it must have been, for he had had no real grief

since then. Anyway, he could not remember. Then he changed his position ; he was very weary, and his limbs ached ; he lay against the heather, pressing the palms of his hands into his eyes. He lay there under the sky very quietly, gaining experience, Hassall would have said, and yet—good God, it was his wedding night !

The dawn found him sleeping. He did not know it afterwards, but he slept for a great part of that night. He never recalled its bitterness willingly. Phases of emotion did not interest him : he suffered, but did not know how much, for he had nothing in common with the artistic temperament that poses even to itself. And, by a merciful law of Nature, he slept.

During any period of mental anguish, after a certain point has been reached, Nature takes the body into her own hands, quiets it, and brings it sleep, and very often in that sleep another point is gained. Pressure has been relaxed ; the soul is free from the imperative demands of an insistent body, to work in its own way ; another level is attained ; the world is seen in a new aspect.

So it was with Gervase. But the birds had been calling to one another for some time before he stirred. He passed his hand across his eyes and found it wet with the morning dew. Then he pulled himself to his feet slowly, for his limbs were stiff with cold. He rubbed his hands together and beat his chest. He ran to restore his circulation. Slowly he realised the new point that had been

gained. His real nature that last night was held in abeyance — a nature educated by prayer, fortified by discipline — had come to his relief. In the sanity of the morning light he saw clearly.

There is no circumstance in life, however horrible, that it is not possible to face if we keep our heads. The danger lies in madness. Passion of all kinds, if it be not the Divine exaltation, is temporary insanity ; and there is no madness so wild as that of anger, despair, jealousy, or fear ; for then the world appears to be askew, men walk upon their heads, and there is no God. Gervase's vision of the world was righting itself, and as a natural consequence his own personal happiness or unhappiness did not fill up his horizon. He returned once more to those old ideals that had occupied him before the transient disintegration brought about by desire. They were there awaiting him. Marriage, indeed, was denied him by a few words spoken in a few minutes ; his barren wedding-day was passed, and he must remake his whole life by the light of those few minutes.

Then he paused in a certain shame as he thought of the preceding night. His pain indeed had been overwhelming, but only because of his weakness. He remembered something that Mark Hassall had said to him years ago : 'There is only one way to conquer pain, which is to escape from it ; and that can only be done by escaping from the claims of self. The moment that the self is forgotten, pain, except in a noble sense, is dead. Nay more, the moment that pain can be *used* for a definite, wished-for purpose, it is no longer an

evil ; it is the only pure good. The pain of the watcher by the sick-bed of a loved person, the pain of the martyr who, in dying, creates a religion,—what is it but happiness beyond all words ? '

Therefore, in flying from an insistent self, Gervase—even as Christian flying from Destruction—found himself free of the burden.

And Miriam—what of her ? She was his wife. Do what he would, escape as he might, their lives were linked together now, ' for richer for poorer, for better for worse, in sickness and in health.' He had dwelt so long upon his own loss that he had not thought of this human life delivered irrevocably to his keeping. What was to be done ? Then he felt once more the stability of the revelation of God in man. There was only one thing that could be done, and that was to love this woman who had sinned against him—love her, not with any love of the flesh, but with a love that strove to emulate even the love of God.

There it was. It was clear enough. Why all this excitement, this turmoil, this stress of heart, these tears ? What did happiness matter after all ? God would fulfil His purpose, whether Gervase Alleyne were content with the world or not.

But—surely Miriam had sinned against him unforgivably ?

He thought of Kate and the history that Kate's eyes had innocently set forth those few days before his bitter wedding, and that knowledge made him flinch. Then he thought of Miriam, his wife—an unknown man's discarded mistress, who had

stolen his honourable name to conceal her shame; and stolen not only his name, but his love for Kate, and the child of love and of honour that might have sprung from such a union. And in forgiving this woman and in loving her must lie his salvation. Forgive her! love her! Surely that was too much to ask of any human being? To the natural man, that old Pagan who lives for some period of time in all men, the thing seemed to be preposterous, almost shameful, far-fetched to the last degree, and worse, smacking of pharisaical cant. Certainly, to behave in such a way was to count one's self 'not as other men'—indeed, according to that robust Pagan's estimate, rather less of a man than more. No one but a poor knock-kneed creature would dream of such conduct; honour, dignity, manhood, were ranged against it.

And yet—'until seventy times seven!' It certainly was Christianity carried to its logical conclusion, that Christianity which was to the Jews a stumbling-block and to the Greeks foolishness. More, it was that Christianity which, in spite of robust common sense, has moved a world, and which was therefore to its generation far-fetched, extravagant, and exaggerated to absurdity. The perfectly balanced man of his time is always the mediocre man. It is not any compromise or balance that is required by the Founder of the Christian religion, but the extreme pushed to its farthest possible limits; and the extreme of anything is always, from one point of view, ridiculous.

It was therefore in this same exaggeration, this

egregious extravagance of duty, this 'folly of the Cross,' that Gervase found his peace.

And having found that, his mind was free for the practical side of existence.

For the first time he looked about him and realised that he did not know where he was. A heath dotted with clumps of larches and young pines lay at his feet; to the right, open ground and the curling smoke of a cottage; to the left, a small copse through which a brook glittered into motion. He walked towards it and splashed his face with the cold water; then he pushed his fingers through his hair, and straightened himself as best he could. He walked on quickly, trying to ascertain his direction by the sun until he came in sight of a beech-wood that seemed to be familiar. He was positive that he had walked and talked there two years ago with Wareham. Now the beeches burnt into flame, while the oaks showed against them pale and yellow. Still that was the place; in spite of its changed aspect, its radiance of hot colour—so different from the tentative delicacy of the spring,—he knew it again. But now the season was nearly over and the country-side shone with the final glory of the transformation scene. Afterwards would come death, which is only change, and then a new beauty of delicate and intricate tracery. He plunged into the woods and struck a familiar path, which brought him out at the confines of the park. How far off in this fresh and glorious morning seemed the madness of yesterday! True, the pain was no less, but he had

mastered it, tamed it, as it were, and it was therefore bearable. The thing that he desired now above all others was some sort of arrangement for the future, a clear line of conduct.

It would be best, he thought, to take Miriam away quietly to some small continental place until after the birth of the child. Then she might prefer a separation : that would be a matter for future consideration. He would do the best he could for her—the very best. He would forgive her as utterly as it is possible humanly to forgive ; but the practical side of the thing had to be faced, and in the light of his love and reverence for his parents, and for that long line of men and women in the past who had borne his honourable name, he must clear up the tangle legally and in such a manner as to prevent any future claims that might be made either by Miriam or by her nameless child. Having once brought herself to tell him the whole truth Miriam could hardly object to this. For the rest, he would, God helping him, prove her best friend.

He thought this all out clearly without heat or haste until he reached the small wicket through which he had passed on the previous night. He looked at his watch ; it was now eight o'clock ; another ten minutes' quick walking brought him to the garden entrance of the house, where a couple of gardeners touched their hats respectfully as he passed, yet not without some hint of surprise at his appearance, and he became, even in the midst of his reflections both practical and ideal, painfully aware that he was hatless and still in evening clothes.

The long window through which he had passed was still open—probably it had remained so all night—and except for a few startled housemaids, who were busy in the corridors with pan and brush, he saw nobody.

At last he stood once more at Miriam's door, as he had stood, with beating heart, on the preceding night; again he knocked, and again there was no answer; again that vague fear of some strange violence stirred his heart; and again he remembered how he had once twisted the water from her dripping gown.

He spoke with a voice husky in a new emotion: 'Mirry, open the door!'

He waited for one more second, then turned the handle.

The room was empty. Hot bath-water and towels betokened the passing of housemaids; also the bed had been slept in—he made out that much. Morning tea stood on a little table at the side untouched. The ivory satin dress lay spread out upon a couch, and a strange disorder of clothes was scattered about the room. A hat and some veils lay upon the dressing-table; he picked up one and fingered it; what a strange thing it was! He had never touched a woman's veil before. As he did so a letter, stuck in the mirror, caught his eye.

It flashed across him that it was like Miriam to run away and leave a letter stuck in the mirror: it was the escapade of the heroine of a novelette. Again his deeper soul was sunk in anguish and a terrible anticipation, while he held at the same

time that curious perception of trivialities which had impressed the outline of the Chinese cabinet in his bedroom for ever on his consciousness. Now, scarcely breathing, full of an agony in which it seemed the long misery of the night had culminated, his critical faculty was unimpaired ; even while doubting if she still lived, he could compare his wife to the heroine of a novelette.

He glanced through the letter and sighed in a profound relief. It was not what he had dreaded, and, knowing Miriam's temperament, had almost looked for. It was something quite different. In a curious revulsion of emotion it turned his criticism back upon himself, and the process acted as a cautery.

This is what he read :—

DEAR GERVASE—I have gone. You needn't be bothered with me any more, and you can divorce me as soon as you like. You took what I had to tell you very well. I used to think, when you read to me under the trees, that you were a saint,—you were so good. I pity any one who has to confess their sins to a saint. I felt nearly mad to-night, you were so quiet over it. If you had gone into a rage and had sworn or kicked me, I could have borne it. This sounds very queer, but if you had wanted to kill me I could have borne that too—but not your smirking kind of forgiveness. You didn't know one bit what I had suffered, and the truth is you never loved me. I can't think why you wanted to marry me. Anyhow, it's no good fussing, the thing is done. Don't try and find me. I shall be all right. I'm not going to commit suicide or anything. I loved him—the child's father, I mean !—not that that would interest you, you'd be too much taken up by the sin of the thing ; but I did—with all my soul, and my body too. I held nothing

back from him. And he got tired of me. Men do. It's no good writing all this, you won't understand, but I thought I'd have a try. You can go back to your quiet life now, and deny yourself meat on Fridays and all the rest of it. I expect that you'll be glad to be able to die to the world quite. Anyway I've given you an opportunity of getting into heaven a bit quicker than before, so I shan't have been wasted. There wouldn't be any blessed saints if there weren't any damned sinners, remember that. Don't think that I mean to insult you. I don't. I mean it true. You'll forgive me right enough when you think it over, I know that too. You'll come out of this finely and do the right thing. I never knew any one like you. But I don't want to have to confess my sins to you again, that's all. And I don't want to live with you or see you again. I'd rather live with some one who had sinned a bit, and who knew men and women, and who wasn't so dead set on Heaven.

MIRIAM.

P.S.—Do you mind seeing that awful maid and telling her I'm mad or anything you like? I shall have to dodge her getting out.

Gervase put down the letter. Truly the heavenly vision was only to be held against enormous odds!

BOOK III

MATURITY

CHAPTER XX

KATE

PARIS was scourged by the March wind; whole streets were caught in its encircling lash; women's hats were knocked over their eyes, and new buds from the trees in the Champs Elysées fell in dismal showers.

Mabel Pike had found it difficult to limit the vagaries of her tailor-made skirt, which blew up into her face, and into the faces of the passers-by, with a joyful disregard of the embarrassed ankles below it.

'I am downright glad to get out of that indecent wind,' she said crossly, when she had reached Kate's flat and made her way into the studio. 'It scorches one too; my eyes were watering even in the elevator. Such a shame! I wanted to look stunning at your party to-night.'

'Because of Georges Samarou?'

Kate was arranging daffodils in a copper pot, and as she spoke she stood away from her work to criticise it, turning her face from her companion.

But Mabel refused to take up the challenge.

'I was thinking of you,' she said severely. 'It

is the guests that make a dinner party. Still, I think you're all right, Madame Meunier is always smart.'

'The wife of an editor—she has to be!'

'I don't see that.'

'Well, she isn't like an art student. She goes everywhere.'

'So do you—now. Say, can't I see the dining-room?'

'Rather!' Taking her friend's hand Kate led her into an inner room, where dinner was laid for five persons on a round table of polished mahogany. The room was small, and sparsely furnished with a few pieces of old design. A copy of Watteau's 'Fête Galante' showed on one white wall, and opposite it, in protest, making that appeal for reality characteristic of all Rodin's work, hung a large photograph of Le Baiser. Some white lilies stood upright as though growing from a low oriental bowl in the centre of the table. Mabel exclaimed at their perfection.

'Lord Wareham sent them,' replied Kate almost apologetically. 'Of course I shouldn't buy flowers like that. He can't dine; isn't that disappointing? An old friend, who is obliged to leave Paris to-morrow, has dropped in upon him unexpectedly. That's why we are only five! But he is coming in afterwards to smoke a peace pipe.'

'I guess those lilies will reconcile you to his absence.'

'Aurélie can't bear them,' said Kate, laughing. 'She thinks that they are too white. She calls this un dîner de Première Communion.'

'Is Aurélie very much elated?'

'Over the dinner part of it—oh, my dear!' Kate dropped into a chair and flung up her hands. 'Aurélie's dinner! Hors-d'œuvre variés pour commencer—va sans dire; Bisque soup, and the right colour, if you please; sole Normande, with every imaginable little fish round it from anchovies to mussels. Aurélie went out this morning and bought every blessed one of them herself! Poulet à la casserole——'

'Poulet—pooh!' Mabel pulled down her mouth. 'How commonplace.'

'Not when it's cooked in Aurélie's casserole! Wait and see! Omelette au rhum, gloriously on fire; fromages, desserts, café, liqueurs, cigarettes, voilà tout!'

'And what are we to drink?'

'Champagne.'

'Kate! Now I'd just ask how on earth can——'

'I can't. It was given me. Ce n'est pas tous les jours fête!'

'But who?'

'Guess.'

'I'll never get there, but it's Lord Wareham or Mr. Denham.'

'It was Jack Denham. I've known him nearly all my life. I couldn't take champagne from Lord Wareham.'

'And why not?'

'Well, for one thing—he wouldn't dream of sending it. He never realises that anything costs money. He is oblivious of the evil root.

'He only sits in the branches of the tree, and——'

Kate held up a finger. 'Don't brill, there's a dear! It's only lost upon me. You can be witty to-night. By the way, why did you come?'

'To bring you some olives, and I'm just thinking that you don't deserve them.' Mabel swept a green bottle from an under-pocket. 'They are the cunning little ones with a hook at the end; you can put them on the table. Now I'm off.'

A couple of hours later she reappeared at the flat blazing in crimson mousseline de soie, which made her black hair doubly black; she excused her emphatic appearance—which indeed had startled Aurélie—by pointing out that as an art student she had little opportunity for wearing frocks; and, indeed, as she had declared more than once, she was dead sick of shirt waists. By the side of her brilliant friend Kate became almost demure. There was nothing scintillating about her; but she shone with a soft glow that came, as it were, from beneath the surface and lighted her warm skin, her eyes, and the quick elusive curves of her lips. To-night she was full of pleasure at the thought of receiving between her own four walls this little party of intimate friends.

Madame Meunier, the only one of the three women who wore diamonds, looked at her with appreciative eyes—she was so fresh, so delighted with the world and with her success, so unaware of her own power. She was quite extraordinary. That lady said as much in a whisper to Georges

Samarou, a young man with hair like a clothes-brush and floating beard.

'These English girls are wonderful. Do you think that it is true that they live only for work, and never think of lovers?'

Samarou laughed as his eyes rested on Mabel Pike. 'It is true of Mdlle. Souls, at any rate, elle n'a pas de tempérament, point du tout!'

'And the English aristocrat—he loves her?'

Samarou's two hands, palms outspread, flashed his opinion.

'Also the young sporting John Bull in the corner?'

'M. Jacques Denham—that is another matter! I could not say. Do you know him, Madame? He is charming altogether, le type anglais tout à fait, mais si amusant and "good fellow."'

Denham had, with his usual power of speedy adaptation to his surroundings, made for himself a very comfortable place among Kate's friends in Paris. He came at first for a few days at a time; afterwards, when he had learnt some of the jargon of the studio, and could tell the difference between a Manet and a Monet, and even chatter comprehendingly of Degas, he stayed longer. Jolly, good-tempered, easy-going, with a good deal of artistic perception, and speaking French like an Englishman, Jack made himself agreeable to every one who came in his way. Georges Samarou, who was bitten with a mild species of Anglomania, although the artist in him revolted, and refused to exchange his velvet coat and wide trousers for English tweeds, piloted him with spirit. He sat

and smoked in the cafés near the Odéon and about the Luxembourg Gardens, and studied the artistic life at Paris from every point. In his lighter moments he tried to flirt mildly with Kate, who was near at hand. Miriam was temporarily wiped out from his view; since her marriage, which he looked upon as an incredible piece of luck, she no longer existed for him, and it was only when some one spoke, for the first time in his hearing, of her husband's surprising conduct in leaving her almost immediately after their wedding to travel in the East, that he felt the least touch of anxiety. But it passed. He could trust Mirry to keep her own secret. However foolish she may be, a woman—through some inherited instinct perhaps—is silent about any occurrence which casts a shade upon her reputation. So silent is she, so wise, that collectively Woman has deluded the whole world into believing certain virtues to be her peculiar property, although to nearly every individual man at some time in his life she has given abundant proof of the contrary. Still, such is her triumph, the sophistry continues, and the world still believes that Woman is pure as it believes that Man is brave. These were Mr. Denham's sentiments, and wonderfully comforting in the circumstances.

He was enjoying himself to-night, and as Kate's little dinner progressed, appreciated to the full his own gift of champagne. Really, on the whole, it was a wonderful little dinner to be cooked and served by one femme de ménage! But then, Kate was a wonderful little woman. There was a

portrait of her in the corner, hanging over the side table. She had painted herself laughing, and the face swam out of golden light, scarcely modelled, but radiant with mirth.

'It's quite commonplace,' she said almost in apology, when he had drawn attention to it; 'it isn't a portrait at all, it is only Jeanne qui rit! You see I have tried to paint laughter—the grin without the cat!'

When Aurélie had cleared the table and brought in the pot for Turkish coffee, which Kate liked to make herself, cigarettes were lighted, and talk became easier and more intimate. After-dinner talk always turns upon the common shop of the company, therefore to-night the conversation was more especially of art and its phases. That France was the home of all art was to this little set of people an accepted faith; they talked of certain Englishmen of the moment whose art would not have existed but for certain Frenchmen, and a string of names were reeled off, each one of which, as everybody there knew, stood for a special distinction. But what did these men not owe to France, some to Barbizon (Corot still lives in other guises on the walls of English galleries), others to Degas, Renoir, Pissaro, and the later men of the new vision?

In the midst of this absorbing conversation the door opened to admit Lord Wareham. He was followed by a young Englishman, who was at once marked off from the party by a certain aloofness in his bearing. The other men, indeed, were each unlike the other, strongly individualised and

contrasting types. Yet they blended. This new-comer stood apart. He brought an alien atmosphere into the artistic circle. Samarou and Mme. Meunier stopped talking. They looked at him with interest. Wareham they knew, his accent and ideas were familiar; but this man, with his regular austere features and short-sighted blue eyes, was in every sense a stranger.

'Here is a surprise for you!' said Wareham, shaking hands with Kate; and Mme. Meunier, looking from the visitor to the girl, saw that her face had become ashen. Kate was annoyed with herself, but she could not help it; the room swam about her; she was at the mercy of imagination, which is only memory in another form.

Across the dining-room of the Paris flat there flowed suddenly an English river, shadowy, unsteady, but flowing relentlessly through the hot sunshine of a July day; and there, wading in it, knee-deep, was a tall fair-haired boy, struggling with a fishing-rod, a hook, and a refractory duck.

Crossing the room, breaking into the visionary river, she welcomed the new-comer; but all the time her ears were filled with the sound of her own voice, crying repeatedly in joyful childish ecstasy, 'Oh, look, look, Gervase Alleyne has fished a duck!'

Later, when she had recovered herself, the evening was changed. Those foolish words still remained at her heart, and by their witchcraft her guests had become to her incredibly unsympathetic. Mme. Meunier, Georges Samarou, were, before all

else, French ; Mabel Pike, seemingly English, was inherently American : what had these people to do with her and with Gervase, and with their old, quiet, lovely, uneventful life at King's Stratton? And then—it was impossible to prevent it at this point—her thoughts dropped to the painful events of the last six months, with their weight of amazement and suspicion. At the head of her table, in the midst of her guests, she felt herself caught and held by a grief too strong to be resisted.

Then she became conscious that Gervase was talking to her.

'Will you show me your studio, Kate? Remember, I don't know you in Paris.'

She opened the door, and passing in before him, lit the room.

'We generally sit in the dining-room in the evening,' she said ; 'it's cosier. My studio is very bare, as you see.'

Gervase looked round him : the room was empty, but for a couple of easels, the throne for the model, some draperies, and what seemed to him to be countless canvasses. Nearly all Kate's studies were of the nude—in light. Her 'Ariadne,' the picture which had established the girl as a painter, was there, in all the circumstances of classic art, and yet in a blaze of what had seemed to Gervase to be a hitherto forgotten sunshine. Another figure—that of a girl lying in a meadow, half woman and half child, with undeveloped thighs and delicate breasts—was bathed in the heat of a summer afternoon ; long grasses made shadows on her bare body ; at her languid feet was the stream

in which she had been bathing, scarcely indicated, a mere suggestion. A lad, painted in broadly, stood for something more simple—a bald fact of human life and limbs in the open air. There was no shadow at all in this picture, no modelling; it was simple to crudity; a statement without comment. He leant across a low wall, his hands on some cherries and one impudently stuck between his teeth. The cherries, mere blots of colour, were not dwelt upon; it was the lad who was insistent—the lad and the light. All these pictures bore upon them that stamp of truth which is originality. Kate had drawn inspiration from many masters, but what she gave as her own, although in some cases undeveloped and even raw in its single emphasis, was a part of herself. It was Kate Souls herself who looked from the eyes of the 'Ariadne,' desolate in beauty and burning sunshine; Kate Souls herself who was the lazy child in that changing meadow full of shadows, and the mystery of earth; nay, it was Kate Souls herself who was that impudent lad, insistent solely on the one overwhelming fact of physical life. She was all this and more than this. Gervase knew it as he turned to her with a flash of recognition.

'I am glad to have seen your work. It has told me——'

'What?'

'Only something that I knew already.'

'You are ambiguous!'

'There are some thoughts that are better not expressed in words; still—I don't wonder now

that men worshipped the sun!' Then he turned away abruptly; the mobility vanished from his features, his forehead contracted and his mouth set. 'May I talk to you?'

'Please.'

'Of sad things?'

'I know that—looking at you.'

'Of Mirry?'

'Yes.'

He burst out. 'I hate speaking of this, but I must! I can't help it. I am leaving Paris to-morrow, and there is something I must know. When did you see her last?'

'About a month ago. I went to her, as you know, after—after you had parted from her. I went to her at Brighton directly she wrote to me.'

'Are you going again—soon I mean? You see, this is March.'

'What has March to do with it? I shall be with her when the baby is born, if that is what you mean. But that will not be for some time yet.'

'Yes,' he hesitated, 'but suppose something should happen—before the time, I mean. These things do sometimes—don't they? She must not be alone.'

'She will not be alone.' Kate smiled at him; in such an affair a woman rules; she was almost motherly. 'I am going to her next week; she insisted on it. It is odd, but those are exactly the words she used. "Suppose something should happen before the time"—the very words.'

'Surely there is always that possibility,' replied Gervase gravely. Kate, looking at him, found it

difficult to imagine that his face could ever have been an expression of his thoughts, as it was only five minutes ago; it was a mask now, and an efficient one.

'In any case you would let me know at once, would you not? I will keep you posted with my address from this on.'

'Why don't you go to her?'

He shook his head. 'Impossible. She doesn't wish to see me.'

'But—how strange men are! It is quite true that when we come into the world we only have one parent—a mother!'

As he did not answer this she went on impatiently. 'It's the most extraordinary thing I have ever heard of in my life. Why is it to be kept such a secret? No one is to be told anything, only you. I have sworn to Mirry that I will never breathe a word. But why? Why? I have no patience with either of you. At first when I got Mirry's letter, I thought that she was mad, and after I had seen her and talked with her —or rather I did the talking, for she had tumbled into a sullen mood and there wasn't a word to be got out of her—I thought she was madder. But upon my word I don't think now that you are any better. Don't you want to see——'

'Yes. Go on.'

'Your child?'

Gervase did not move a muscle. 'You don't understand,' he said, after a tense pause, 'and I can't explain. Perhaps some day Miriam will tell you. I can only ask you to believe that things

are not as they are without a cause. She was quite right to go, and from henceforward our paths are separate. It is a tragedy, and I can't tell what the end of it will be. It is enough to live by the day's light between the morning and the evening. God considered the sorrowful when he made those divisions of time. Now don't you think that we ought to go back to the dining-room. Your friends will wonder what on earth we are doing.'

'Oh no, they won't,' said Kate coolly. 'They don't wonder at anything I do.'

'You will remember your promise?'

'To let you know what happens—immediately? Yes, I will remember.'

'Good-bye, my friend,—my dear friend.'

'Good-bye.'

For one moment he touched her hand, and then they turned back into the dining-room.

There the conversation had passed from art to literature, then to the woman in literature, and finally to the Feminist movement generally, but more especially in its French aspect. After that it had flagged, and when Kate opened the door she found the party broken into couples, Lord Wareham chatting to Mme. Meunier, and Georges Samarou devoting himself to Mabel.

Jack Denham sat alone, turning over some sketches, but occupied more intently with his own thoughts. He had found Gervase quiet and self-possessed, although his manner lacked its ancient cordiality. 'Good old Mirry!' said Jack to himself, 'she has held her tongue all right, I knew she would! But if she hasn't blabbed, then what

on earth can have happened to part these two? That's what beats me, beats me out and out—to nothing.' But he had no more time for speculation; it was late, and Mme. Meunier had risen to go.

Kate had good reason to be proud of her entertainment. Her guests left, pleased with her and with themselves, which state of things is the last ambition of every right-minded hostess; and she, while she could keep her thoughts on the rippling dancing surface of her soul, was happy. She was afraid of the depths; but then, she shrugged her shoulders at the thought—so are many other people in this world!

'How odd!' said Gervase to Wareham as they walked back to their hotel. 'I didn't even notice the colour of her dress.'

'I did,' replied Wareham; 'it was purple, in some lights brown, and made of a soft silk. She was adorable in it—lovely beyond words! How like you not to notice.'

'Who are you talking about?'

The question came jokingly, as a retort to his enthusiasm, but Gervase found suddenly that pain, being one in essence, has many varieties. He was afraid to think; like Kate, he was in a way happy, but afraid—ah, how horribly afraid—of the depths.

CHAPTER XXI

IN WHICH GERVASE MEETS WITH SYMPATHY

To a certain extent, and inadequately for fear of incriminating Miriam, Gervase had confided in Lord Wareham. His conduct, it seemed, cried for explanation, and the tax he laid upon the faith of his friends was considerable. Before this he had been obliged to explain his abrupt departure from Wick Abbey not only to Wareham but to Lord Corfe himself, which he did, pleading the desperate state of his wife's nerves that had resulted in her subsequent breakdown. But he was glad now to be able to talk in a larger measure to Wareham, knowing well that such an obvious secret would inevitably have stood between them as a barrier. For his own part Gervase had no craving for speech; indeed, as time went on he became more reserved, more impenetrable.

'You get older every day, Gervase!' said Wareham, shortly after they had arrived in London. 'I wish you wouldn't.'

'I won't when I get something to do,' he replied; 'it's doing nothing that brings down my grey hairs.'

He had not long to wait. Before the end of the week he found himself established as private secretary to a Minister, which appointment left nothing to be desired, since politics were his ultimate goal. He took a small flat in Westminster, and as he did not intend to return home for some time, he sent a competent agent to King's Stratton in the place of the bailiff who had served under his father, and who was now getting old in body and old-fashioned in ideas. This change required tact in its achievement, for Gervase did not want to hurt the old man; and it also necessitated some correspondence with Sir James Brereton, proving in the end successful in more senses than one, for it cleared the air of mystery and brought him once more into touch with the Weybourne people.

Lady Brereton had been deeply grieved at the sequel of the wedding, and each version of the story that came to her seemed to be more incredible than the last. For months she had set all she knew of Gervase Alleyne, his life and character, against unanswerable facts; but she could not justify him. Gervase had left his wife, in defiance of his marriage vow; he was bound to her inevitably, and he had left her; there was no gainsaying it.

To Mrs. Milman, the housekeeper at the Hall, growing old now, the matter was quite simple. 'Poor lad, and what did you do it for?' she said, shaking her head at an imaginary audience. 'What sort of a woman have you married, after all your praying, Master Gervase?'

But after that Mrs. Milman shut her mouth firmly, and threatened with dismissal any maid-servant who spoke of what did not concern her. The alterations begun at the Hall after the wedding were carried out faithfully, and certain rooms were redecorated for the bride, but no bride returned to occupy them.

Later there came a rumour to King's Stratton that Mr. and Mrs. Gervase Alleyne were separated. But the mystery remained, and Lady Brereton poured out her doubts to Mrs. Savile.

'What, doubt Gervase — doubt Gervase Alleyne!' cried the little lady. 'How can you, Pippin? Of course he has left her—he is travelling in Morocco with Lord Wareham—but if he has, there was nothing else to be done! Be sure of that! Facts! Pooh! I don't care for facts! If I saw Gervase Alleyne picking a pocket, I should not believe my eyes, that's all.'

'He has a good friend in you,' replied Lady Brereton; 'and perhaps what you say is true.'

'I know it is,' said Millicent conclusively.

After Gervase had returned to London, Marion asked if she might write to him, 'just to give him a welcome,' she said.

'My dear, you are old enough to settle such things for yourself,' replied her mother.

'Then I think it would make me happier to write,' said Marion slowly, leaving her mother to ponder the odd turn of the phrase.

In the meantime Gervase lived full days and went tired to bed every night. Detachment grew

upon him, and a curious callousness to suffering, whether in himself or in others. If God meant the evolution of the world to be by pain, why trouble about it? These things did not matter. Nothing mattered. He lived from day to day according to his light, but his spiritual life seemed to be arrested. The truth was, that he was living with only half his powers; a door had been shut down upon his development, and soul revenged itself on body, body upon soul. But he never complained, even to himself, and for this period of his life his *journal intime* was laid aside; he wanted to annihilate his pain, not to perpetuate its life on paper. He used the moment, with its duties and pleasures, as fully as he was able, and when his thoughts became importunate, turned to some new work. He made many friends at this time, and appeared everywhere, living brilliantly upon the surface of existence. His old power of attraction helped him; he was learning now to manage people, and with the new knowledge there came a certain contempt for the facility of the business. Every point gained brought him less pleasure, but greater assurance.

Mrs. Willoughby Fairfax, watching his progress at this time both in London drawing-rooms and elsewhere, was delighted with her nephew; she almost forgave him the absurd fiasco of his marriage; she quite forgave him when circumstances presented the opportunity for saying 'I told you so.' He made an exceedingly presentable addition to her little dinner-parties; for he talked willingly to dowagers, and listened gravely to the

opinions of young ladies in their first season, as though they had been very Sibyls. But she lamented only that it was impossible now to marry him to the right woman.

This appeared in discussion with intimate friends.

'It's all so extraordinary, my dear! Poor Gervase is a kind of grass widower now; and goodness knows where the woman is! But they are not legally separated, I believe, and I always consider that so improper. It was an impossible marriage from the first. She was a dreadful creature—talked about "gurls"—don't you know the kind of person?'

Lady Brereton did not encourage this gossip. She had come to London rather earlier than usual, on account of Marion, who wore a pinched-up look that spoilt her prettiness, and needed a change; she was also somewhat irritated by Mrs. Willoughby Fairfax's airy kinship with the young man—a kinship which demanded so much attention and yet evaded all responsibility. When that lady remarked sententiously that 'blood is thicker than water,' Pippin Brereton, remembering her lad's solitary past, sat silent, but wondering.

This visit to town set her mind at rest to some extent, but did not entirely allay her anxiety about Gervase. He lunched and dined with the Brereton a good deal, and was entertained by Kitten at his club, but to Lady Brereton it seemed that he was restless, and increasingly so as March wore itself away. It was true. Gervase found that at this time he could only concentrate his mind on either

work or recreation for the shortest periods; it returned continually, springing back as it were, to a permanent haunting image of two faces in very different settings. He told himself that it was ridiculous that two women who had deliberately, in a sense, severed their connection with him, should so possess his future that he found himself living in an attitude of suspense towards each, a suspense inimical either to work or rest. Yet so it was. Kate had promised to let him have news of Miriam; but so far no word had come. He told himself that when the expected event was over he would settle down more easily to his state of married celibacy. Perhaps, when her child was born, Miriam would do as he wished and live abroad, so that there would be little chance of running against her. In return for the generous settlement he had made her, she had signed the document declaring that the child to be born could claim neither parentage nor estate from Gervase Alleyne. This much he demanded in consideration of the past, and she made no objection. The thing remained a secret known only to the lawyer, but even that did not matter much. She had left her husband, and there were few people to know or care what happened to her. As he refused to divorce her she intended simply to vanish away and disappear from his life altogether. But as yet, he thought grimly, she had done neither.

Gervase looked through his letters every morning, vaguely and irascibly expectant, but they turned blank faces to him inscribed in familiar or

unfamiliar caligraphies. How well he knew Kate's handwriting—and Miriam's too, for that matter, although she had only written him a single letter.

Still nothing came; until in early April, and when he was least expecting it, a telegram was handed to him. He read it twice before he understood its full significance: 'All going well. Will wire again later, possibly to-night, Kate.'

That was all. It was inexplicable, and yet he experienced a quick relief, as though a string pulled about him tightly had suddenly been snapped. He could not account for his emotion in the matter. And yet, the world had agreed to call Miriam his wife; she bore his name, and in the eyes of the law, and, he supposed, of God, she was his wife—his wife bound to him, although as a corpse might be bound to living flesh. He felt neither love nor hatred for her; but she was his wife and it was impossible not to feel anxiety. At the same time there came to him an immense hunger, an inextinguishable desire for the common lot of man. He was no solitary, dwelling in silence on the high peaks of existence, but a lonely man sick to death of his loneliness, weary of himself, weary even of his God. Suppose this child arrived at birth to have been his child! Suppose —ah, he could suppose nothing of that sort! The mental guillotine was again applied, and the thought buried in a mass of correspondence.

He found, later, in looking over his engagements for the day, that he had promised to take Marion and her mother to a matinée. The thing

had escaped him, and he doubted now if he could fulfil his pledge, but in that case how disappointed Marion would be! He read the telegram again, 'possibly to-night.' Kate would telegraph to-night and he could not miss her message; if it came earlier it would be brought to him at the theatre. He decided to follow the course of the day as though nothing unusual had occurred; and indeed nothing had, for what can be more usual than birth? 'Nothing,' he said to himself. 'At least only—death.'

When he arrived at the Brereton's for luncheon, he found Marion awaiting him alone in the drawing-room, prim and fresh as ever.

Marion always reminded him of a singularly neat pink-tipped daisy. Time had wrought a greater change in him than in her; it had used sharper tools, in dealing with him, and had cut deeper. The girl noticed the difference. Gervase, it seemed to her, had not only grown much older, but had become somewhat alarming. His marriage had altered him, his marriage and something else of which she knew nothing. That made her sigh and wonder. Gervase Alleyne and Marion Brereton were not in reality of the same species. There was as much difference between them as there was between the wooden top of the fairy tale, and the morocco ball. And yet the girl had an old photograph of a long and gawky boy in an Eton suit, which she kept in the secret drawer of her bureau, on the back of which was inscribed :—

I have you fast in my fortress,
And I will not let you depart,
But there I will keep you for ever
In the round tower of my heart.

Although it had given her great joy to write out these lines, copied from a birthday book, and, to her, exceedingly touching, Marion always prayed most emphatically to be delivered 'from battle and murder, and from sudden death'; for she could not endure the thought of anybody finding that photograph and guessing her secret.

At the present moment the young man's evident absorption in some painful circumstance filled her with the desire to offer sympathy.

'Something is troubling you, Gervase?'

Giddy at the thought of such presumption, she laid a timid finger on his coat. For a moment he was startled, then he covered the small hand kindly, for he saw that the girl's eyes were full of tears. He did not deny his trouble to her, but he could not bring himself to acknowledge it.

'Do you know, Marion,' he said after a short pause, 'I would rather be here at this moment, with you and your mother, than anywhere else in the whole world. But—I can't talk to you of gratitude.'

Marion drew away her hand, while a quivering smile rose to her lips. 'I knew something was troubling you,' she said again.

But it was the first word of human pity that Gervase had received, and when Lady Brereton came into the room with another welcome in her eyes, he felt once more the old kind affectionate

atmosphere that in his boyhood had stood between him and utter desolation. This friendship with the Breretons was the nearest thing he knew to family intercourse; for here, even the servants had a smile for him—he knew some of them personally, and most had come from the neighbourhood of King's Stratton. To a man whose life-long sickness had been loneliness, these things were warmth, comfort, home. Life had hardened Gervase outwardly, provided him with that impermeable shell on which every Englishman prides himself; he never showed his feelings and hardly ever his faiths; if anything stirred him, it was relegated to the depths, and his expression remained unmoved. This imperturbability was the consummation of his education, the thing for which he had learnt Latin metres and Greek paradigms; but, with a nature so sensitive and so emotional, it had only been attained at a cost scarcely commensurate with the suffering involved.

Lunch passed in that light pleasant talk which has a background of years to rest upon, and where so much is taken for granted that there is time for laughter. And later the play proved to be as amusing as it was impossible. Marion was delighted with it; she twittered with amusement and clapped her hands, appealing to Gervase for his concurrence. Replying, he smiled into her brown eyes, and noticed how Marion's eyelashes were neither too long nor too short, but fringed her eyes darkly with surprising neatness. Now he was even happy in a way, floating upon

the moment; and yet from time to time a resistless undertow caught him to the abyss. Even as the curtain went up on the second act, he found himself speculating on the inconsequence of life. At this moment while he, with the rest, was laughing at a ridiculous travesty of facts, a woman was crying out in the hour of her travail, and a new human being was fighting for existence.

Then he returned to the play. Two young people were making love in epigrams. He did not object to them; the epigram is as good a formula for love-making as any other; love defies art as it defies words—and even Romeo and Juliet are mere conventions—but what on earth, he thought, did he, Gervase Alleyne, know about this matter! Again his mind was started on its own career. He had never heard the name of the father of Miriam's child; still it was not difficult to guess. She had practically told him that day when, innocent of the future, she poured forth the reason of her unhappiness. He remembered Jack Denham's expression on the night of Kate's little dinner-party in Paris. He had looked anxious then, anxious and furtive.

The curtain fell and he found himself applauding violently—but what? He did not know why he was clapping. Then he turned to conversation, but not to criticism, for he had not even seen the end of the act. He laughed at himself grimly; these sudden drops into a second world had brought to him a sense of unreality.

There had been no telegram—how strange that was! Kate said that she would wire later!

Later must mean in the evening! He had left a message at the Box-Office that any telegram or letter should at once be brought to him. There was nothing. Well, he must wait in patience!

When the play was over he gave the Breretons tea in a restaurant, and then returned to his flat. His man assured him that there was no message. He sent a second telegram asking for news, and afterwards walked down to the House of Commons, for he had some work to get through that evening. He dined there with his chief, buttonholed one or two people in the lobby whom it was necessary to interview, and at last, having accomplished all, and more than all, that he had bargained for that day, walked back by the Embankment to his rooms in the Temple. It was a clear moonlight night, the water might have been crystal, so silvery was it; and the mysterious bank opposite, where no civilised person, it seemed, ever penetrated, might have fallen into romantic shadow but for illuminated advertisements. What a night for the country! A vision of King's Stratton in the first glory of the year rose before him. Miss Kirkwood's ash would be bursting into full leaf now—Miss Kirkwood's ash, with a sovereign at its root!

CHAPTER XXII

IN WHICH FATE DISPOSES OF ALL PREVIOUS ARRANGEMENTS

GERVASE found his man waiting for him.

'There is a lady to see you, sir.'

'A lady! James. Did you say a lady?'

'Yes, sir, a lady—Miss Souls is the name.'

The shell served Gervase admirably; not a muscle of his face moved; and yet in a flash he had grasped the significance of those words. Something had gone wrong! Perhaps Miriam was dying—dead even—and Kate had come up to London to break the news to him! That was why he had had no telegram.

He pushed into the room. At first he could see nothing; but after a moment, a dim figure rose up from the depths of an arm-chair.

'Did you mind? I asked him for a fire.' These were Kate's first words as she shook hands. 'It was so chilly.'

'A fire! Asked whom?'

'Your man. Didn't you call him James just now? I have been here for about two hours, waiting for you. He brought me some supper too.'

'You did not wire?'

'No.' Suddenly all the spring in her vanished, and the girl drooped quiescent—strangely unlike herself. 'I did not wire. I thought I might—by talking, you know—I thought I might prepare you best myself.'

'I know what you are going to say,' he answered; 'I knew directly I had set my foot in the flat. Go on.'

Kate drew a breath to steady herself, but sat with her hands pressed against her eyes.

'She got worse so quickly. I didn't telegraph to you until we thought she was safe. And then, at the end, it was as though she—dropped.' She looked up at him. 'You say you know, but are you quite sure that you understand?'

'Miriam is dead.'

'Yes.'

'And the child?'

'Still-born. We have passed through an awful time. I did not know what women are called upon to endure. How should I? Sharp, sheer, naked agony; that's what child-birth is—the tearing of one person into two. Poor Mirry, poor girl! All that—only to give birth to—the dead!'

She stopped, exhausted. Her face was livid in its pallor; she had scarcely enough strength to form her phrases.

'You are not fit to be here,' said Gervase. 'You are worn out.'

'No, I am not!' she replied with some show of energy; 'I was. I was so hungry.'

'Heavens! For God's sake eat!' He sprang to the bell, but she stopped him with a gesture.

'I have, thank you. I am so callous. I asked for supper directly I got here, and your man brought me chicken and claret. Ah, Gervase, what are we made of, you and I, that we sit here and talk about food, when the things that I've seen to-day are happening every minute? It was so queer, so queer! You remember how tremendously alive Mirry always was? Her life was almost violent, and now she is—nowhere! She fought, poor girl—you can guess how Mirry would fight?—she was so big and strong. Do you know, Gervase, as I watched her, it didn't seem to be Mirry any more, but just a part of life itself—being done into nothing! Then, when she was exhausted and gave up the battle, she was Mirry again, but different. She talked then a good deal, in whispers; afterwards she slept, and life just hung about her, fluttering in her eyelids and breath. It hung there for a while and then it went.' Her voice ended in a sob. 'Surely, Gervase,' she went on, when she had recovered herself, 'surely this world, where it is possible to suffer so, must be something tremendously important. Look!' She thrust out her hands to him. The sleeves fell back, and he could see that her arms were bruised into purple and grey patches. 'Look at that. I held her hands. The nurse said she should have had a towel to pull at—a towel! It was awful, unspeakable, you can have no idea what it was like. The Bible knows—there a woman in travail is the type of all anguish!'

She had done talking, and she lay back in her chair exhausted ; Gervase, looking at her, noticed the dark ring round her eyes.

'You have suffered too.'

'I—oh, I don't matter!'

'Don't you!'

Scarcely knowing what he did, he took her cold hands and held them against him, kneeling in front of her on the rug. He could think only of her, and that he did but dumbly. He felt dazed, not quite awake. Kate had come straight from the middle of it all ; she was fresh from the sight and sound and touch of it. He thought it odd that she should have quoted the Bible. 'The pains of hell got hold of me, and the fear of death compassed me about'—Yes, that was it. He tried to see it ; he did see it ; but it left him cold. Could it be, he wondered, that he had no heart—no bowels of compassion? Perhaps. This was the second time that he had faced death, and yet the remembrance of that first experience was the more keenly alive.

With Gervase Alleyne, as with most solitary people, the past is always more or less the present. At this moment he could see his mother's dead body, and himself, a little child in a blue blouse. How real it was ; but this—this was like a story, that had happened to somebody whom he had never known. Kate had realised it. Kate, whose hands he was holding, had taken the pain and the loss into her own soul, and was shattered by them. He did not speak, but remained for some time—a long time, it seemed—holding her hands. Then

he dropped them and returned to his seat. The two sat in silence, thinking deeply, going over the past, according to the habit of those who stand near to death. All the old common life of bygone days is then laid bare ; and when speech becomes possible, 'Do you remember?' is the most natural phrase.

At last that time came, and Kate talked of the old memories. It seemed to help her ; indeed at this point she felt that speech was almost a necessity. To one recovering from a mental shock there comes a moment when the overcharged nerves demand an outlet, and if through any reason this is denied them, the force returns upon itself, rending and tearing afresh. Speech is the natural outlet for emotion, and the void created by it is naturally filled by the gentle sedative of human sympathy. Then, and not till then, the sufferer is on the way to a fair recovery.

Certainly, as the minutes passed, Kate grew quieter and her face fell into more easy lines. Gervase noticed the change in her, and it brought him a sort of comfort. It seemed as if the mere fact of his presence had power to help her, and that was something for which he thanked God. He was entirely absorbed in her suffering. He looked upon this trouble in its more immediate result and as affecting her ; for the rest, he was simply unaware of himself.

But suddenly, with one sentence, she brought an element into their talk which had the effect of rousing him to self-consciousness.

'I wonder if it would comfort you to know

something ?' Kate's face grew more animated and a glow shone in her eyes. She was like a person who, for the moment, had turned away from the contemplation of horror, in order to bestow a gift upon another. He felt it vaguely and it turned his thoughts towards himself.

'It would please me to know anything that you wished me to know,' he answered.

The light in her face grew to a smile inexpressibly radiant, as though, standing in the doorway of the grave, she had become aware of something wholesome and lovely.

'Before Mirry died, Gervase, she told me—everything.'

'Everything ?'

'About—her child—and—about you.'

Then it seemed indeed that the bars were lifted and life rushed back upon him. He realised himself now, and all this meant, but he had no words. Kate, looking at him, saw that his face had grown almost grey ; her own was misty, yet shining with compassion, almost maternal in its ruth.

Still Gervase did not speak ; there was nothing for him to say, it seemed. His mind was occupied chiefly by a sudden influx of gratitude to the dead woman, and that it was which had opened the door. She had set him free. He was righted in the eyes of the one person by whom he would not willingly be misjudged. Gratitude grew merciful. Poor Mirry, she had paid the price at last ! The sins of the body were here expiated by a bodily anguish that he could hardly accept. The thought,

coming as it did, wiped out resentment from his mind ; nothing was left but a great pity.

'She was quite right,' he said sadly ; 'I was a prig.'

Then he became aware of Kate staring at him with wide-open eyes.

'What is it you say ?'

He repeated the words.

'A prig !' She laughed quietly, in the way a mother might laugh to see her baby run alone. 'Oh Gervase, I can't find a word—Dear God, you were all the angels rolled into one to her !'

'Did she say that ?'

'Not in those words. But she was quite just, she gave you your due. She told me of the wedding-day—and afterwards ! Oh Gervase, how did you bear it ?'

The question did not really require an answer ; and none was given.

'Then, when you wrote offering to take her back as your wife after the child was born, she was touched—your letter touched her. But she would never have left the child to go back to you.'

'I like her for that.'

'So do I. She had altered a good deal, you know. She was ill so much—on and off. "You know, Kate," she said to me once, "I'm beginning to see that a lot of the things that Gervase told me are true. I think differently about them now, somehow. When it's all over, I shall write to him and thank him. I think he is the best person I have ever heard of—but then, he got all his knock-

ing about when he was little. I don't love him a bit, and I did love the other, and yet, somehow, I'd rather he had been the baby's father. Isn't that a queer position? If anything happens to me, will you go to him and ask him to forgive me for having called him a prig?"'

'Is *that* what she wanted forgiven? Only that?'

'You know Mirry never did grasp fully what she had done. She didn't understand in the least. "If I die he can marry again," she kept saying, "and if I don't die he can divorce me whenever he wants to. So that's all right."'

'That's all right!' Gervase echoed the ironical phrase. 'No, indeed, she didn't understand!'

'Ah, don't be cruel to her, Gervase,' cried Kate. 'Think of what I have seen to-day! And what is in your mind? Surely what she said is quite reasonable!'

'You think that, because you don't know the meaning of a Christian marriage. It is a sacrament—a thing indissoluble. Miriam is as much my wife now as she was this morning.'

'But—but—she was never your wife.'

The retort brought them to the edge of an argument from which Gervase drew back. At such a moment there could be no bandying of words. Kate was overstrung, scarcely herself, or she would not have pursued that direction of the talk.

'I am grateful to her for telling you,' he said, 'whether she understood my position or not.'

'But, Gervase, she did understand! I don't

mean that she saw things as you see them, but she knew what—what you had done for her. "Tell Gervase I'm sorry," she said. She was near the end then, poor dear, but she didn't know it. "Tell him if it hadn't been for him I should have done for myself before this." She was quiet for a long time after that, nearly an hour; then she began again—do you want to hear all this?'

'Go on,' said Gervase.

'Well—she said it with that funny, side-long smile of hers (do you remember it?)—"When I get well I will do what Gervase wants; I don't care any more for pleasure. I haven't since my wedding-day, it's all gone sour. 'Give up pleasure,' Gervase said to me once, 'and you'll find peace.' That's God's truth; I've proved it. I did get peace of a sort the minute I'd told him all about it." Then she could not think any more, she just stopped and lay still. She only spoke once again before she died.'

'What did she say then?'

'"Nothing matters," that was all. She had borne such awful pain, I shouldn't think it did—at that moment. You see, Gervase, she did her best at the end, and would have done more if she had had the strength. Do you really understand? Are you quite sure that you forgive her?'

'Quite sure. I forgave her a long time ago.' He thought of his wedding-night, when forgiveness appeared far-fetched and almost ludicrous; and now, in the light of all that had come and gone, he was thankful that he had not rejected it. And

yet at first he had not taken it altogether wholeheartedly. He was saturated through and through by the Christian law, and the duty of forgiveness was laid upon him as an obligation. He was bound to it as much because it was a law as because it was in itself beautiful and reasonable. Kate Souls would have understood the beauty, but not the obedience. Life to her was freedom, and any compelling power that stood outside her reason would have appeared to her a thing to be resisted.

Thus the two were necessarily opposed. But for the moment they were conscious only of being extraordinarily at one, drawn ever closer together by their common suffering, and their common secret.

There was no more to be said. The night grew deeper and stiller, until the sound of a striking clock broke across Gervase's meditation, and pulled him back into the present. Twelve o'clock! It was impossibly late; and there was Kate still sitting looking into the fire, apparently unaware of the passing of time. But as he counted the strokes, his face betrayed his anxiety, which she was quick to forestall.

She stood up and buttoned her coat.

'I suppose I ought to be going!'

'I think so. I will see you to-morrow. I should like to go down to Brighton with you.'

'Thank you. I wanted you to. Mother is there alone, and naturally very much upset.'

'Where are you going to-night?'

She looked at him blankly and then smiled. 'I don't know. It was very careless of me, but I did not think about it. I came straight here.'

It flashed across him how characteristic were all her actions. She never in any circumstance considered the opinion of the world.

'You had better stay at the Station Hotel,' he said quickly; 'I will come and see you the first thing in the morning.' As he spoke he rang for a cab.

They waited for it in silence. The inrush of life's detailed business had severed them. Only for one instant, as Kate raised her eyes to bid him good-night, did Gervase catch her soul in their depths, and hold it in an involuntary embrace of sadness and of comfort.

CHAPTER XXIII

BLUE AND ORANGE

And yet Gervase had not made the discovery of his freedom. The thing dawned on him gradually, bit by bit, but it was months before he made it finally his own; and, when that time came, he realised himself in one sense as doubly bound. Free, in the eyes of the world, he was bound only on one point; but on that point, alas, was staked all his happiness. For, there was no denying it, love, the great adventure of life, had come to him as a tragedy, and that because of what was in reality a non-existent barrier. The facts of the case, those bare bones on which hung such dreary issues, were known to the world and real enough; and yet it was a marriage that was no marriage which had placed him in a false relationship with the woman he loved—and that a relationship which roused in church and state the ferocity of conscientious warfare.

Therefore at this point in his career Gervase Alleyne, being what he was, stood still, it seemed, at attention. He had returned to Brighton with Kate, as he had suggested, and had helped her and

Emma through all the sombre details of the funeral. Much to Emma's surprise there was to be no business of carrying the body back to King's Stratton to be laid with all the pomp of nodding plumes in the family vault of the Alleynes. Gervase, quite definite as to his wishes on this point, found support in Kate; and Emma, murmuring of 'the proper way of doing things,' was forced to submit.

'*Sacred to the memory of Miriam Alleyne and of her infant daughter*,' ran the inscription over Mirry's grave. The tombstone set a seal on the past; it told no lies and it recorded no blasphemies.

The words, which had been followed for how many years by how many thousands of stricken hearts, were read over the body by unacquainted lips and endorsed by three mourners only—'*As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly. . . . Behold, I show you a mystery.*'

Kate remained with her mother for some time, when all was over; but Gervase returned to town and to his work. Mrs. Willoughby Fairfax found him much the same, a little sterner, a little thinner, and more lined—'in fact,' as she put it to her friends, 'even more interesting than before.' It was quite clear to everybody that she told the story of his unfortunate marriage as one that had mercifully come right in the end, and in the only way possible. Gervase heard her once—it was

only one sentence, but it implied that view—and the pity he felt for Miriam, who had so wronged him, rose almost to indignation. Poor Mirry! There was no one in the world to mourn her, no one to whom the tragedy did not come as having, after all, a happy ending, no one but Emma—and she did not know! Poor Mirry!

But as time went on even this extravagance of compassion died also, for Gervase only felt the intolerable fret of the bondage imposed upon him. He applied himself the more assiduously to work, and it became harder than ever to secure him for social functions. Mrs. Willoughby Fairfax gave it up. But she had made up her mind to see him in Parliament; and in this aspiration Gervase had no wish to baulk her. It was as much to his satisfaction as to hers that the rumour of his standing for Harboard in the Liberal interest at the next election gained ground. The seat was at present held by a Conservative, held by a considerable majority. But who would be the more likely to reduce Sir Edward Prinknash's numbers than the young Squire of King's Stratton, whose name in connection with many public schemes was already on people's lips? Besides, the Alleynes of King's Stratton dated farther back than the Prinknashes, and had for generations enjoyed a greater popularity.

Gervase was willing to stand; he had given his word for this in the past, and now the time seemed ripe. Hitherto his secretarial duties, with the work he did on various committees to help forward the causes he had made his own, had fully

occupied him. He had never faltered from the ideals built up at Oxford ; but he found the realisation of them farther off than he had imagined, and the mere working out of details more complicated. These things, and his position as the private secretary of a minister, brought him into touch with the essentials and methods of government, so that it hardly seemed strange that he should find it his turn to contest a seat.

The turmoil of the election was upon him before he had fully realised it. He found himself holding meetings night after night, or arguing with the farmers of his immediate neighbourhood, and the shopkeepers and manufacturers of Harboard, answering the same interminable questions, throwing verbal obstacles in the way of his adversary, —making the same irrefutable statements, until he began to wonder if, after all, he really believed them, so far had the words become divorced from any inspiration of reality. His agent was acute and energetic, and the country-side was canvassed with more than usual diligence. King's Stratton and its neighbourhood was his to a man. The market town of Harboard remained neutral, if so negative a word can be used to describe such a stormy state of indecision ; it inclined first to one side and then to the other, and its neutrality was held only by strong pulling. Weybourne, dominated by Sir James Brereton, a Conservative by blood, was cold ; and Gervase did not like to consider the effect of this campaign upon his Weybourne friends. He saw them at church now, and that was all.

'Stay away for a little while, my dear,' said Lady Brereton with warning commiseration; 'you know how much we care about you, but you see you *may* get in, and that would upset Sir James so terribly! You do understand, don't you? Of course if you don't get in, you can come as soon afterwards as you like.'

Gervase did understand, and he smiled as he answered the appeal in Marion's serious eyes.

Peter Brereton had no patience with him, but that was an old story; all his life Gervase had exasperated the invalid, who now lay on his couch and let fly stinging missiles, which never hurt the object at which they were aimed, because they never reached him. But they aggravated Sir James's mood. 'Dear Kitten,' his wife would say soothingly, when Peter had done his worst, 'do leave Gervase alone; he can't help his opinions, you know!'

'Pooh!' said Sir James testily, 'everybody can help their opinions! They *are* their opinions. Who says I'm not my opinions, and who says that I can't help myself, I'd like to know?' He glared round, but the statement was clearly incontrovertible.

As the warfare progressed, Peter grew puzzled.

'I can't make out Gervase,' he said one day, 'he is so queer! He's as queer about this as anything else! Oh, I know I've said it before! I'm always saying it! But he doesn't harp on the usual things in the way the other fellows do. It's slum-dwellings and sweating-dens, and all that, which makes him go mad. He's always talking

about the poor and every man's right to live. If that's all he wants, he'd get as much out of the Conservatives as the Liberals if he only knew it.'

'Well, you've got to call yourself something,' said Kate Souls, to whom the remark was addressed, 'and anyway Liberal stands for—getting on, what d'you call it?—progress!'

'Oh, well,' growled Peter, 'it might be possible to "get on" so jolly fast that you would miss these very things I'm talking about.'

It was just a chance that Kate happened to be at King's Stratton at this time. She had come on a short visit to her mother, and this aspect of politics interested her considerably. It was something entirely apart from the life she was familiar with, and its development amused her as a play might have done. But soon she was not content to be merely amused, she must needs plunge into the field, and do battle with the rest. She allied herself to Millicent Savile, whose husband as a Liberal landowner was doing all he could to support Gervase's candidature, while his wife, with a small band of ladies, was organising a Liberal Woman's League in Harboard. Before long Mrs. Willoughby Fairfax, who could not bear to be left out of any excitement, arrived; and, with her as temporary mistress of the Hall, Kate helped in all the necessary entertainment that was going forward.

But although she wore the blue ribbons of the cause dutifully, she never quite knew what all the fuss was about.

'I don't think I believe in party government at all,' she said to Gervase, pursing up her lips; 'don't laugh: this is the result of much deliberation; if you belong to a party, it seems to me that you vote for two things you don't believe in, in order to get one through that you do. Isn't that it?'

'Perhaps,' said Gervase cautiously. 'It can't be helped.'

'It'll be helped some day,' said Kate wisely. 'It'll be helped by all the really important things being worked by committees drawn from all parties. That's it,' she went on, nodding to herself with pleasure at her discovery. 'It's the housekeeping of a nation that matters more than anything else, isn't it? I'm sure I've heard you say that.'

'If you start new theories, at this moment, you'll confuse your Liberal women,' said Gervase.

'What do you take me for?' cried the girl scornfully. 'If I don't much believe in parties, I do in people, and I want to get you in. Oh, my dear Gervase, I never open my lips on these things except in an authorised phrase, and'—she waved a blue scarf in his face—'look at that! I look abominable in blue! See what I'm doing for you.'

But Mrs. Milman's views on the subject really delighted Kate, for she spoke from her heart. The old housekeeper seemed to be wound up on the election; a word, a look of encouragement, and off she went.

'A lot of coming and going, and meals eaten

standing up—that's what I call it! Master Gervase hasn't dressed for dinner for three weeks unless there have been people here, some of which didn't ought to be dined, to my mind. At other times there's no dinner at all, only eggs to afternoon tea. An' then there's that little wiry agent in an' hout, in an' hout like a tight-skinned flipperty-gibberty terrier. Bad feeling in the place too, there is, an' the girls going out some in blue, some in orange. What do they know about it? They only choose the best-looking man of the two! Then the end—don't I know! A lot of getting drunk. Master Gervase says he won't have that, but it'll be all the same whether he haves it, or not, or whether the little wiry man haves it either—because it's human natur' when your worst passions is aroused, and that's what it is. No end of money spent, and the horses taken out of the carriage on the night he's in. That's an election, and when all's said and done, I ask you, who's the better for it?'

Emma Souls looked at the 'goings on' that so disturbed Mrs. Milman in a gentle surprise. She was impelled to conservatism by her Past. She adored 'family' and disliked above everything else the 'lower orders.' That Kate would not argue with her on politics was a distinct annoyance. 'You needn't be so hoity-toity!' she said more than once. 'You always were, from quite a little thing. I'd a sight rather ask Gervase about anything than I would you. He doesn't think me dirt under his feet, although

I am only his mother-in-law, while I'm your mother.'

Since Miriam's death Emma had very little to occupy her, and her powers of nagging had developed ; but her daughter had short patience with the poor lady, although indeed she strove towards that grace with all her power. More critical, Kate was harsher than Miriam ever was, and tolerance with Emma's exuberant vulgarity was a thing not easily arrived at. She never listened to stories of the Past, thereby depriving Emma of a good deal of the pleasure of her society ; indeed, this in itself became a grievance, so that when the time arrived for Kate to return to Paris Emma was not overwhelmingly miserable.

But that time was not until after the election. Kate stayed to the end and drove voters to the poll in a borrowed dog-cart. She wore a bright-blue flat cap, which weighed down the heavy masses of her hair, and blue ribbons streamed from her whip, which somewhat consciously she held well forward.

Once, as she drove down by Weybourne Park, the Brereton carriage, with orange favours, dropped upon her from an avenue ; she fell back meekly to let it pass, for she did not want to appear to be racing Lady Brereton.

Harboard—orange and blue, was in an uproar. 'Vote for Alleyne' in blue, vied with 'Vote for Prinknash' in orange ; boys pelted each other in the streets—and any one else they dared ; even cart-horses, and little dogs, wore coloured favours.

Gervase enjoyed the excitement. All the week

his meetings had been filled to overflowing; he had had the support of an eminent statesman and a well-known man of letters, to whom, with the rest of the house-party, Mrs. Willoughby Fairfax played hostess.

'There's not much doubt how things are going,' was the consensus of opinion at the Hall. The atmosphere reeked with optimism; never were people so jubilant. But then the other side was jubilant too; it was a point of honour. Blue tried to detect a hollowness in the laughter that came from the orange camp, and rivalry, even in high spirits, ran strong.

By this time Kate had never enjoyed anything so much in her life. 'I wish there was an election every day!' she said enthusiastically. 'It's lovely, like'— she paused for a simile, and added— 'hunting. You feel more alive than you ever did before; you've got to get there or die.'

She was surrounded, even at this moment when weighty matters were in progress, by a circle of what Mrs. Milman would have described as 'followers.' She picked them up as she went along. Her reputation as an artist, growing both in London and Paris with every new picture that came from her studio, had preceded her, and she, following in the rumour, banished it by the greater attraction of her presence.

'Sweet girl,' said Mrs. Willoughby Fairfax to Millicent Savile. 'She is doing more than all the rest to win Gervase his seat. Why he couldn't have married her instead of the other beats me! All the same, between ourselves, it's just as well

to be done with the Souls family once and for all; don't you think so?'

'Yes,' said Mrs. Savile; but she added to herself, 'I wonder if you have done with them! I'm not so sure!'

Towards night the ferment increased; and Mrs. Milman's prophecy was at all points fulfilled. The numbers went up at twelve o'clock: Alleyne 8534: Prinknash 7687.

What followed was also what Mrs. Milman had foretold.

She knew what an election meant! Sitting with some of the ladies'-maids in an attic to watch the muffled glare of the sky that hung over Harboard, she discoursed still further. In the midst of it all they caught the strains of the 'Conquering Hero.'

'It's 'im!' cried one of the maids, nearly weeping with excitement, 'and they're coming hup the drive! Oh, ain't it lovely!'

Mrs. Willoughby Fairfax ran out on to the steps; the torches illuminated her face, the lights of the hall threw her redundant figure into relief. She thanked everybody, shook hands, and congratulated them. She might almost have won the election herself. She did not subside until Gervase made a speech, which echoed all her sentiments; then she wiped her eyes. 'I brought him up,' she said with emotion, 'he is like my own son.'

'He's a jolly good fellow' sent them all indoors, and the crowd back to Harboard to finish the night.

The time had come for Kate to say good-bye. She hesitated; the night was chilly, and she insisted on finding an extra thick cloak which had in some way got mixed up with a pile of rugs; it was difficult to disentangle. One of the escort (of the three young men who dogged her), waiting to conduct her and Emma back to their cottage, discovered it at last with the help of Bennett. Still she did not go; it seemed that something weighed upon her. Then she made up her mind about it—that also was obvious to everybody. She turned to Gervase without embarrassment.

'May I speak to you?'

'Certainly.' He opened the door of the morning room, closed it, and then stood with his back against it, facing her.

She noticed for the first time how tired he looked; his eyes were slightly bloodshot, and the hand on the door-handle seemed unsteady. She remembered how she had got him there, and laughed out loud.

'How brazen I am! Did you see Mrs. Willoughby's face when I said I wanted to speak to you?'

'Well, what is it?' Somehow he avoided her eyes.

'Only, I have got to say good-bye. I am going back to Paris to-morrow.'

He started. 'To-morrow! So soon? Why to-morrow?'

'It's as good as the day after. Better; the day after is a Friday. You did not think that I should be here always—did you?'

'I didn't know. I—haven't thought of it much lately. This beastly election——' He stopped talking and appeared to think. Suddenly he turned blazing eyes on her; convention had dropped between them; he looked now, and did not take pains to veil his soul.

Kate turned away; she grew uncomfortable at the thought of what she had done: well—it wouldn't really matter, she was leaving next day!

The strains of 'For he's a jolly good fellow' came now from the servants' quarters. They seemed to recall Gervase to all that had happened.

'Parliament,' he said meditatively; 'dull work really, in spite of the send-off. But I suppose it's another crisis in my fortunes!' Then he laughed, 'Oh Kate, Kate, my dear, you are always here when these things happen!'

'Yes,' she returned, but his mood was infectious and her gaiety sounded forced. 'I shall be the first to write Gervase Alleyne, M.P.'

'You will send me a letter soon—soon? Promise me that you will.'

'You said that before, years ago—just those words!'

'Yes, yes—I know.'

Magic had fallen on the air; it grew heavy, charged with an unknown force; each was afraid to speak, almost to move, for each knew that a spell worked.

Kate was the first to defy it. She said 'Good-bye,' and her voice sounded normal, so normal that it pulled him back to an old decision.

'Good-bye.' He stood very still and held out a firm hand.

There was no wavering now; he had mastered the situation even more completely than she had —as indeed he saw with a sudden piercing joy, which was also pain, when he looked into her face.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE HOUSE

QUITE three months had elapsed before Gervase delivered his maiden speech ; but when he did so, it was to a full house, for the bill on which he spoke was one that had touched the popular imagination. For his own part, Gervase was tense with excitement. Half derisively he recalled the emotions attending on his maiden speech at the Union. But here he found a difference in the air. To young Oxford, brilliance was the first quality of an orator—a trick of phrasing, a mastery of paradox. Mannerism of a sort was a necessity, and the pith of the matter of little moment. There they made bricks, certainly with a deal of straw, but with little else of substance.

But here, self-assertion of any kind became ludicrous, and flippancy vulgar ; humour indeed was at all times a necessity of life for men who sat day after day dealing in words, and he smiled to see how childishly they snatched at it ; but brilliance, when it came, was more matured, and shone with a different and less garish lustre.

Gervase had the qualifications which go to

make the success of a maiden speech. One was a prophetic faith in his cause, the other a personal humility that showed itself in an absence of any sort of theatrical effect. He spoke as a new boy to his monitors, but a new boy from whom there was more—a great deal more—to come. When he sat down, the applause always granted to a new member was longer, and held in it a truer ring of cordiality than usual.

Lady Sarah Beverley behind the grille strained her white neck to catch a better view of the new member.

'Isn't he a dear?' she said in a whisper to her companion; 'I stayed in the same house with him once years ago. He was just the same then. He is so conscientious. That speech has made a hit. It wasn't very clever or smart, but it was quite extraordinarily sincere, wasn't it? The truth of it simply clutched you. That's what I call genius.'

The lady addressed turned her head languidly.

'Who is he?'

'Gervase Alleyne, member for Harboard.'

'He looks interesting: is he married?'

'Yes, but the marriage wasn't a success. Anyhow the wife is dead now, poor thing, and people tell me that it is a mercy. Oh, what's that?'

It was the attendant of the ladies' gallery who touched her on the shoulder. She turned and saw Lord Wareham, whose guest she was, waiting for her by the door. Wareham had been returned at a bye-election in the previous Parliament, and, fortunately for Gervase, who saw more of him in these days, he still held his seat.

'Am I wanted now?' Smiling, Lady Sarah nodded to him and stood up, extricating her silk skirts with difficulty from the narrow row of chairs.

'I am so glad you waited for that speech, Tom,' she said graciously, when they gained a region where speech above a whisper was once more permitted. 'I know that young man a little. But how hot it is in the gallery! It will be delicious to get on to the Terrace. What we go through up there, no man knows! That's one of the reasons why I want women to have votes. Who is coming to your tea-party?'

'Mrs. Savile and somebody you don't know—Miss Souls. She is waiting for us on the Terrace.'

'Kate Souls, the artist?'

'Yes.'

Lady Sarah clapped her hands softly. 'How too thrilling! Do you really know her? I have been wanting her to paint me for ages.'

Wareham turned a smiling face, full of frank, brotherly admiration upon her. 'She ought to be delighted—as delighted as Romney was to paint Lady Hamilton.'

The speech induced a small hushed peal of laughter. The lady looked at him through her lashes.

'How dear of you! What a sweet compliment. One is always so pleased at being told that one is like a beautiful, disreputable woman! I would much rather be like poor Emma Hamilton than —somebody really good—shall we say Hannah More.'

'I am positive that you are not in the least like

Hannah More. Shall I get Gervase Alleyne to join us? I could send him a note. He has done his speechifying now, and ought to be able to slip away for a time.'

The proposal pleased Lady Sarah. 'Oh, get everybody,' she said, with a little gesture of open hands. 'I adore a crowd!'

When they reached the Terrace, they found Kate already seated at one of the small tables. A few people stared at her, but she did not see them: she was leaning back in her chair, watching the eternal stream of traffic on Westminster Bridge.

'Isn't it queer,' she said, when she had been introduced to Lady Sarah; 'it is changing every minute, and yet it is always the same, just as though it was gummed to a tape that goes round and round like a penny toy!'

Lady Sarah laughed at her. 'No! I refuse to discuss the traffic on the bridge, Miss Souls. I have met you face to face at last, and I must come straight to the point. Will you paint me?'

Kate lifted her head and looked at Lady Sarah anew, as though she had not really seen her before: then she moved to one side to get another position. She was too much occupied to reply.

Lady Sarah fidgeted, and then continued, talking fast. 'Don't say no! Oh, don't! I know you are translating me into an imaginary picture, and you are going to say "chocolate box"! *Please* don't. I am really not so conventional as I look. I know that it's too horribly boring for an artist to paint people with straight noses and

that sort of thing. It must be, because of—well, because of the kind of people they seem to love painting! Did you see the "Dream of Beauty" at the Modern Gallery? My goodness, the frights! It wasn't a dream, it was a delirium. But—there, I can't go on! You *must* stop looking at me, for I can't bear it. Let me know my fate at once. Will you paint me?'

Kate was amused at the torrent of her words, and inclined to hesitate in order to induce further supplication. Lady Sarah was exquisite in movement, and she moved perpetually. She was like some wonderful butterfly with changing iridescent colours.

'I should like nothing better in this world than to paint you,' Kate said at last with conviction.

'How heavenly it must be to be beautiful,' put in Mrs. Savile, who had just joined them, and stood at the back with Wareham listening to the conversation. 'I don't mean beautiful when you've got a new hat, but beautiful, morning, noon, and night—beautiful when your hair comes out of curl, or when you get a red nose.'

'How does it feel, Sally?' said Wareham.

But Lady Sarah merely frowned at him, and refused to reply.

'You are not going to pretend that you are bored at being beautiful, are you?' said Mrs. Savile appealingly.

The frown changed to a laugh. 'No, but I'm not going to pretend that I'm not bored at finding nice, modest, suitable answers to people when—they are kind.'

Lady Sarah moved in an atmosphere of laughter. It rippled about her gently. Now it was Wareham who broke through it into words.

'Sally, my most dear cousin, you are the frankest woman that ever walked this earth, and I love you for it! Here is Gervase Alleyne!'

Gervase threaded his way through promenading couples. He did not look at them, but scanned the faces at the tea-tables until he reached Lord Wareham's party. But they looked at him—Kate saw that much. Lord Wareham had told her that while she had been sitting outside lazily watching the flowing river and the traffic on the bridge, Gervase had been delivering his maiden speech. She was sad to think that she had not heard him. From henceforward, since the night of the election, their lives were to run on different lines. Evidently that was what he had intended in the finality of his good-bye. She watched him now as he came nearer. He smiled at Mrs. Savile, gave himself in pleasure and surprise to Lady Sarah Beverley, and then, with a curious alert expression of one armed at all points, welcomed Kate as though he had expected all along to see her. But he was on guard. The excitement lent him by his speech had died away. His forehead was drawn, and there were distinct wrinkles about his mouth.

Kate's feelings were complicated. Perhaps Gervase was annoyed at meeting her thus without warning, for of course he had imagined that she was still in Paris. But she had come to London for a particular purpose, a purpose with which

Lord Wareham was connected, and he had very naturally asked her to tea on the Terrace. She would be forced to meet Gervase in London, if not at King's Stratton, sooner or later ; and, after all, it might as well be sooner. But, as it turned out, she found the meeting unexpectedly painful. The iron of that careless parting had entered into her heart : it had pinned her like a nail that still held. She had not written to Gervase, as she had promised, but then he had not written to her, and he knew her address very well indeed. The thought of this rankled. Granted that she had promised to be the first to break the silence, he ought of course to have written to know why she had not done so. The thought was entirely unreasonable, but entirely natural. Now she had to account to him for her presence in London. That would surprise him—or perhaps it wouldn't! She was so unhappy that she really did not care : now that he had found so many new interests he might not even want to know why she had come. Why should the new M.P. for Harboard, who had just made so telling a speech, trouble himself about her? She remembered how, long ago, Oxford had blotted her from his mind.

But he did want to know! Indeed, this was his first question when he got an opportunity of speaking to her alone.

'I have so much to do in London,' she explained ; 'two portraits at this moment, and to-day I have promised a third.' She smiled across the table at Lady Sarah.

'Lady Sarah Beverley?' he said quickly.

'Yes. The thought of it delights me, but you see—don't you?—that I can't be continually rushing backwards and forwards between London and Paris. And I don't want to keep a permanent studio in both places.'

'Yes,' he said, pondering the idea in perhaps another aspect, 'I see. But what does all this mean? Are you coming to live in London permanently?'

'Yes. That's it. That's what I'm here for to-day. I'm going to take a house.'

'A house!' He woke up suddenly. 'Do you really mean it?'

'Why not? It will be lovely. Also I shall be able to give mother a home for some part of the year; and that's a consideration. She is very lonely all by herself; she does not think Paris is a respectable place to live in.'

Gervase smiled, for he knew that it behoved Emma, in consideration of her Past, to be careful. He noticed, too, that in the excitement of all these confidences Kate had recovered her usual manner.

'Do you see any objection to my taking a house?' Her eyes challenged him.

'No. No—o,' at first he hesitated in doubt that was resolved into a sudden smile.

'My dear Kate, I can't imagine you a householder! You see I haven't realised you in that capacity—paying rates and all that! It's too absurd! What do you know of such things? Well, tell me where the desirable mansion is to be?'

'In South Street: Lord Wareham has been making inquiries for me.'

'South Street! Lord Wareham!' In the passing of a phrase Gervase stiffened to rigidity. Kate saw his change of countenance at the mention of Lord Wareham's name, and took comfort. Never did a display of annoyance come as a more soothing balm. He was jealous. The knowledge lifted her into heaven.

'Can you afford South Street?'

'You don't know how rich I am.'

'But a London life is an expensive life.'

'I only mean to have as much of London as I want.'

'London will settle that—not you! Once you establish yourself in that neighbourhood you may kick against the pricks to no purpose. You will be out every night in the week, and most of the days.'

Kate's reply (there was no reply really in Gervase's opinion) was cut short by Lady Sarah.

'I must go,' said the beauty regretfully. 'And I *have* enjoyed my tea so much. I love the Terrace; the crowd is such an amusing cosmopolitan crowd, isn't it? I always wonder where it goes to when it goes home! It's piebald like the dress circle in a theatre. I love it. I can't bear to leave it. Now, dear Miss Souls, when and where will you paint me? I am afraid that there is nothing like a studio in my house.'

When and where indeed! Kate was baffled. She was inclined to call Gervase's attention to this immediate demonstration of the necessity for a house of her own. But even if the little place in South Street were everything that she

imagined it, it would hardly be ready for her to paint Lady Sarah there until August at least. She supposed that she would be obliged to hire a temporary studio. But finally after more talk the difficulty was disposed of, for it was arranged that Lady Sarah should stay at King's Stratton with Mrs. Savile during the summer vacation, and that Kate should paint her there—in the open air if possible. The beauty was of an opinion that during the season she didn't look her best, also—a lesser matter—she could not spare the time for sitting. When it was all settled, she sighed rapturously. 'How quite too utterly delicious to be painted in the sun! The sittings will be too heavenly! I am so longing for the time to come, dear Miss Souls! I shall drink in great draughts of sunshine and feel a child again.'

'You'll get freckled, Sally!' put in Mrs. Savile.

'I don't mind that,' returned Lady Sarah with a fine contempt; her beauty was beyond the reach of such accidents.

She purred her way through the crowd; and her garments, apparently a part of herself and growing on her, seemed mysteriously to follow. Perhaps it was because Lady Sarah herself was the first to attract the eye, and the iridescent silks and gauzes, like the wings of dragon-flies, which fluttered round her, were only adjuncts to her beauty. Yet for their own part they seemed to be alive and had a trailing habit. The rest of the party watched her disappear escorted by Lord Wareham. Then Mrs. Savile turned round laughingly to Kate.

'There go Tom and Sally! At any rate the

present day is democratic in its use of Christian names. Good-bye, my dear, I must go too. I shall see you soon at King's Stratton. No, don't come with me, Gervase. There is a man there, a member, whom I want to speak to, and he will see me through the House.'

After she had gone, Kate sat at the little table, leaning her chin on her hand. She seemed to be unaware of Gervase's presence.

'A penny for your thoughts,' he said, after he had borne it for nearly four minutes.

'I was only thinking of Lady Sarah,' replied Kate, picturing her. 'What a joy to look at anybody so lovely! Thank God who made me a painter. You couldn't *write* about her, could you?—or make music out of her? You can only paint the vision as it strikes you. And then—oh, then——'

'What?'

'You lose the best part of it.' She stood up, pulling on her gloves. 'The moment a vision is materialised it is lost. That is the tragedy of art. Lord Wareham is a long time putting her into her carriage,' she said in another voice.

'Yes,' returned Gervase, stiffening visibly. He looked at his watch. 'I—I am afraid I mustn't wait for him to return. I——'

But there was no further need for him to search his brain for excuses; at that moment the bell rang for a division. He ended abruptly, 'I must go back to the House.'

His look and manner completed Kate's cure.

The fact that he was entirely miserable was now sufficiently patent. She caught at his conventional hand outstretched.

'Oh, Gervase,' she said, with smiling tears in her eyes, 'don't go to your House—at least only for a minute; I suppose you must go in and divide! But come with me to mine afterwards. I—I shall cry if you don't see it!'

CHAPTER XXV

WHICH PRECIPITATES THE CRISIS

In some lives all events centre round one spot of earth. There, and not elsewhere, is in very truth the earth from which they sprang, and to which when the time comes—in spite of wanderings—they will inevitably return. Thus it was with Gervase: he shared the substance of King's Stratton, he belonged to the place.

To King's Stratton time had made little difference, and yet chestnuts and sycamores, which Lady Mary Alleyne had never looked upon, now reared young and arrogant heads; growth had been there—growth and change. In church—and the moment to see King's Stratton was in its Sunday best—the transformation was most evident. Mr. Money was redder and wider than formerly, and more comprehensive in his optimism; a high Churchman at the beginning of his career, time had passed on and left him low; therefore in sheer self-defence he became, what is equally suspected of both parties, broad.

Sir James Brereton eyed the expansion of the Rector suspiciously. Years, alas, had taken from

Sir James his pleasant kittenish humour, and left him quarrelsome. Mrs. Savile declared that it was because too much allowance was made for his shortcomings in his own home.

'What else could be expected of a man with a wife like Pippin?' she exclaimed to her own long Richard. 'A selfless wife makes a selfish husband!'

'And what happens to the husband when the wife is—the reverse of selfless?'

'Well, nothing much, I'm afraid. You see men don't use the cares and sorrows of life to embellish their characters as women do!'

Emma Souls, the other inhabitant of King's Stratton with whom we are concerned, clung more tenaciously than ever to her past and lived in a world of imaginary titles. She, like her neighbours, remained true to type, and was still herself, only more so. None of these people had departed in any way from the lines originally laid down for them: all had followed straightly, simply, and unconsciously the bent of their natures: for that is the way of normal human beings: it is only the one in the hundred who doubles upon himself, as it were, and about whom it can be said in sincerity that 'one really never can be sure what he will do next.'

Gervase Alleyne was the one.

During August Lady Sarah arrived at the Saviles, and Kate, with a view to work, established herself in Emma's cottage. The weather encouraged portraiture in the open. Never had

there been such sunshine. The heavens poured golden light, and the earth, instead of shrivelling before it, opened a green moist bosom, and spread itself in luxuriant happiness. This was the fact which, translated into statistics, would show that for so many hours by day the sun shone, and for so many more by night the rain fell.

Kate, like the earth, basked in the sunshine. She fed upon it also, it seemed, and, like a flower, grew more fragrant and lovely in its warmth. Her veins ran sunshine, that was the truth! It glowed under her transparent skin, in the cherry red of her lips and the brightness of her brown eyes. She had no time now for brooding on the past. She was painting a subject after her own heart in the open air, and the open air is in itself hostile to introspection.

And yet, Gervase Alleyne was staying at the Hall, and although she had been in the neighbourhood for a fortnight, he had never been to see her. She told herself that he had Mrs. Willoughby Fairfax to entertain, and a house full of people; which was true, for indeed he moved in a crowd at this time. She and Emma dined at the Hall shortly after her arrival, and she saw Gervase in the distance at the head of his dinner-table and felt him to be almost a stranger. Afterwards it seemed to her that he avoided her. Do what she would, the night that followed on that dinner-party was a sleepless one and yet one that registered for her a stern resolve. 'I will not be at a man's mercy,' she swore, and meant it. 'He shall not spoil my life. It shall be glorious in spite of him.' But sudden tears wetted her pillow.

Kate had not deceived herself in her decision, the sentimental enjoyment of tears as such did not appeal to her : she had her work to do. Therefore she caught at work, which meant for her happiness, and the cure succeeded beyond hope.

Meanwhile Lady Sarah was amusing herself by speculations on the girl's probable future — a brilliant one, more brilliant perhaps than that achieved by genius, at least in the eyes of a certain set. Lady Sarah had good grounds for so thinking ; the behaviour of her cousin could mean only one thing ; every one in the house, with the exception of Kate herself, must have noticed it. Wareham was staying with Gervase at the Hall, and every day, on one pretext or another, he strolled through the woods to the Saviles. On Monday it was some book which he desired to lend to Millicent Savile, on Tuesday he thought that Lady Sarah was too strenuous a model, and that motoring would be an excellent tonic for her. There was, of course, plenty of room in the car ; left alone, Miss Souls would have nothing to do —naturally Miss Souls also accepted the invitation.

'Utterly unsuitable from every point of view but one,' said Mrs. Savile, when Lady Sarah had confided her suspicions ; 'and that one is, of course, the happiness of the parties concerned.'

'Well,' returned Lady Sarah plaintively, 'I do think Tom might consult me a little. Goodness knows I'm a sentimental fool if ever there was one ! '

One day Lord Wareham, more than usually baffled by Kate's absorption in her work, did con-

sult his cousin. He came out to her in the garden, when she was resting after a sitting. The picture stood near her, defiant in colour, daring in laughter, the essential Lady Sarah.

Kate had just gone into the house. To-day perhaps more than usual she had painted like one under a spell. It seemed as though she saw light and colour, invisible to the others, which she was afraid of losing.

'I don't think that women ought to be allowed to be artists,' said Wareham to Lady Sarah. 'The State ought to interfere. I'd be a Socialist if it would.'

'Why?'

'Art is a deadly opiate judging by its effect on Kate——'

'Oh, you call her Kate, do you?'

'What else should I call her? Is there any objection to my calling her Kate?'

'None that I can see—but that's not saying much. Do go on.'

'Judging by its effect on Kate, art is like dram-drinking; it prevents her from taking a reasonable interest in the ordinary affairs of life.'

'What kind of affairs?—love affairs?'

'Hang it all, Sally—you must have seen that she would far rather fling herself into a mess of yellow ochre than into a man's arms!'

Lady Sarah's laugh rose to a musical little shriek. 'What a description! The yellow ochre holds the divine fire.'

'Well,' he paused, and then continued emphatically, 'so does the other!—or it ought!

I am very stupid at explaining myself, but why can't she fall in love like other people?'

'Like you?'

'Yes, if you put it in that way. Only don't talk about it, for heaven's sake! I can't stand that. I wanted to tell you and I've told you. There is nothing to be done now but to wait.'

'What for?'

'Until she shows in some way that she cares twopence about me, I suppose.'

'I shouldn't wait,' said Lady Sarah calmly.

He turned on her in a joyful fierceness.

'Oh, Sally, what a brick you are! Anybody else would have pointed out the — oh, you know——'

'Undesirability of such an alliance! Don't be afraid, you'll have plenty of that!—Thomas Egdon, commonly called Viscount Wareham, marries a little unknown artist——'

'Not unknown, Sally——'

'Only known in artistic and intellectual sets. Had she been a ballet dancer, her name would have been a great deal more familiar to some of the people you will introduce her to. No, there is no getting out of it; from every point of view, it is an unsuitable marriage. So much the better! I don't believe in suitable marriages. With birth and wealth and good looks equal, you get the inequalities somewhere else. Mine was a suitable marriage,' she added under her breath.

'Poor Sally!'

She turned on him with a fine spirit, although her eyes were blurred.

'Jackanapes! How dare you! Pity isn't to be mentioned in the same breath with Sarah Beverley. What a return for my sympathy!'

'How can I make any possible return for your sympathy?' he answered sadly.

'By taking my advice and proposing to the unsuitable lady this very afternoon! Why delay? *He either fears his Kate too much, Or his deserts are small!* My dear, if she takes you, she is the woman to make you happy.'

'Bless you, Sally!' In a sudden overflow of emotion Wareham caught at her hands and crushing the fingers together kissed them in eager gratitude. 'Bless you! bless you! bless you!'

'Dear Tom, what a benediction! But—you tickle my fingers!'

He drew away from her. Something else had sprung to his thoughts, and he considered it, staring across at a distant pergola of roses. Her kindness had given him a taste for confidences, and he remembered another friend who perhaps—he was not sure—should have been the first to know of his decision.

'Well, what now?'

'You know Gervase——'

Lady Sarah turned like a flash. 'What has he to do with it?' Had he thought about it, he would have wondered at her expression.

'Nothing, of course. Only it has been on the tip of my tongue for ever so long to tell him. I'm awfully fond of Gervase, you know. He is a sort of elder brother or father confessor to me. I should like to ask him what he thinks about it.'

Lady Sarah was a woman of strong intuitions; and she was now almost startled at the lack of any such quality in the young man in front of her. She opened her lips to answer him and then shut them firmly, while many expressions passed across her face like shadows. Gervase Alleyne! It is only in looking backwards that we know how time passes. She saw him sitting at her feet in the moonlight, an eager boy, wild with the thrill of life, and unconsciously for the moment in love with her, a boy so straight and honest and unaware that she had checked the word that might have broken down the barrier, and had left that to be done by time and another woman. How he had emptied out his heart that night! Surely if anybody on this earth deserved well of Fate he did! And now—— She was all compassion for the man, caught in a very jungle of circumstances and beyond the help or comfort of any human being.

'What are you thinking about?' said Wareham.

'Not much. Don't tell Gervase Alleyne, Tom. He'll find out soon enough.'

So far as this Wareham took his cousin's advice; but later he 'feared his Kate'—and also his fate—too much to do as Lady Sarah told him. Over and over again he tried to compass the pair of them and failed. Kate, like a young goddess superior to petty human entanglements, moved through the small snares he laid for her, and by her own unconsciousness destroyed them. He contrived ambuscades, and, concealed behind them,

attacked her; but she turned upon him a face sisterly in its merriment and routed him. At the same time, although she was honestly unconscious of his ingenious pitfalls, Kate had reached the age of twenty-five years, which to a woman is a fine maturity, and could not be ignorant of his passion. But in her assumed blindness, she expressed to him what she desired to be rather than what she was. She knew all he wished to say to her, and she used all the force she possessed to prevent him from saying it. Hence the impasse at which he found himself. She did this, not from virtue, but from instinct. The vanity which urges some women irrevocably to an opposite end, was in Kate non-existent. She had no desire to hear words spoken which could have no fruition but chagrin and disappointment. Love, unless it came as the unique triumph of a lifetime, must come as a disaster. She was too passionate for trivialities, and too magnificent for compromise. She could not understand the coldness of the intriguing woman, who lived to draw love to herself while her own heart remained unscathed. Kate desired to give rather than receive, while to receive where she had not given would have been in her eyes a profane theft, a sacrilege.

This was her nature, an essential instinct in her, but at the same time not infallible, not proof against temptation. She was still sore from the neglect of the man to whom, in imagination, she had given herself; and a marriage with Lord Wareham seemed, from one point of view, to be the happiest termination of an impossible and

harassing situation. She almost loved him—which proves how far she was from the true experience —she admired and trusted him ; should she take him she would make him a good wife. Thus stood the balance—on the one side, all the kingdoms of the earth, with love thrown in—love, and the hope of woman, the child that might be hers, flesh of her flesh and bone of her bone. But here Kate refused to think, for her judgment was not trustworthy; longing dazzled her. And on the other side, a shadowy beckoning ideal—a love that hurt her heart, that spoilt her work and her exuberant health, a love that could never reach fulfilment, and yet a love which, crying silently, received an answer.

She hesitated—what wonder !

As time went on she flagged, for she found her high endeavour something of a strain. On some days, when all went well with her, and her paint grew alive in her hands to form a veritable breathing Lady Sarah, Kate was content enough ; but on others, her desire for a simpler, more human goal overshadowed her ideal. She had no religion in which to lose herself. She turned from its formulas in a kind of weariness, as from something threadbare. And yet she knew that it meant illimitable things to the man she loved. She could not understand these things—she did not try to. She realised them as little as she did the law by which he considered himself bound. A part of this law she did accept, that part which appealed to her reason as a human being. She tried, as far as in her lay, to hurt nobody by

thought, word, or deed, and to behave to others in the way she would have them behave to her. Beyond this, she could not see reason. Where faith was necessary to supplement logic, Kate acted on instinct. She did not know why she could not contemplate a marriage with Wareham without doing violence to herself, only that it was so. The craving in her for something beyond the confines of human thought showed itself in this turning away from the substance to the shadow—which is in reality the essence of all religions. Like Gervase she was — but unwillingly — an idealist. She worshipped even as he did—but an unknown God.

And in consideration of the bond of love and of years which held them, it was natural that this should be so. Love may exist between people with different ideals; but then it is struggling and ephemeral, a human craving rather than a divine fulfilment. It arrives at its full measure only when there is between the two a common ground of thought, and of action, only indeed when the woman is in all senses a rib—a part of the very life of the man to whom she has given herself. Then love is inevitable and unafraid, strong in the force of two wills made one, two lives made perfect.

Kate groped after this knowledge with difficulty, guided by a light that came from she knew not where, and that, a light uncertain, liable to be smothered for the time by any chance occurrence, and fitful as a will-o'-the-wisp. She became the prey of moods. The thought of her lonely future

followed her ; doubts multiplied in the gloom, and conquered even the outside sunshine.

It was at such times as these that Wareham's suit told ; more than once, had he but known it, he might have conquered. For Kate felt her strength ebbing. 'One day,' she thought, 'he will say it all, and then——' She was so lonely, so hungry for human sympathy.

At last that day came. Her picture was finished—not all she wished it to be, but more in colour and expression than the world expected of her ; and she waited helplessly in a sort of terror, as it were, with her back against the wall, warding off with outstretched hands the approach of all that the world calls happiness. She was leaving King's Stratton on the following day, and Lord Wareham had sent down a note asking permission to call and say good-bye. Her heart knew that the moment to decide had come, and the choice seemed to lie between a dream and a reality.

Wareham found her pale and strained, grey shadows underneath the eyes. He had never seen her so plain, and he had never loved her so much.

The thing was soon said, and he found in a sort of surprise that the simplest words were the easiest. She listened to him silently ; in her state of piteous indecision, he was all she wanted—a man who knew his own mind, an upright gentleman, a true lover, one on whom she might rely until death. Her admiration of him was such that she was nearly won. If only she had loved him ! What then was love that at call it turned

and hid, and stole out surreptitiously at a perilous juncture? As he talked of his present hopes, his future plans, his love, she could see his face burnt colourless by the fire of his passion, and was torn by grief at the mere notion of hurting him. She felt ashamed to think that he should love her so much. Then she realised that he waited for her answer. The moment she had dreaded had struck, but she was no nearer a judgment. She turned faint and trembled.

'My dear, my dear,' he cried, 'I hurt you.' She lifted an appealing hand outstretched to him. 'Ah, now, I have you! I have you!'

She shook her head dumbly, for she could not speak.

'What, then?'

'You have done me a great honour.' Her words, her tone, startled him; and indeed for her own part she hardly recognised her voice, for it was as if some one not herself had spoken. 'I shall never forget.'

Then his face set sternly. 'Honour! forget! What does this mean? Listen, Kate, if you would rather think about it, if you would rather I came for my answer to-morrow, I will. I have been too abrupt. I might have remembered that you were thinking of nothing else but the picture. —Ah, my love'—he bent over her chair, relapsing into a very passion of tenderness, the tenderness of a reserved man—'I am not used to wooing. All my pretty words have gone. I can only talk in curt phrases. I think it is—because I am so much in earnest.'

'Yes,' she gasped, scarcely breathing, 'me, too.' She looked up at him, smiling wanly. 'I—can't talk at all. Perhaps——'

'What? Perhaps— you could love me?'

Again her smile flickered. 'Any other woman would!'

He was puzzled: her point of view, her words, were so strange. Whether she accepted or refused him, he was positive that she would do it in some way and for some reason exclusively her own.

'Why would any other woman?' His eyes, the whole pose of his body questioned her.

'Because,' she faltered, and, not knowing what on earth to say, spoke the truth; 'because you are so splendid!'

Dumbfounded, for one instant he broke into laughter from sheer gladness. Kate was his own now by that acknowledgment. He took her in his arms, and pulling her to her feet held her to him recklessly. She was his world now, kisses his right, her lips and eyes and face were all his.

At first Kate struggled, terrified, as one drowning might struggle against an encircling sea. Then the lassitude that falls on those who drown enveloped her. Of what use to resist? Fate was stronger than she was. She was conquered now, caught and conquered.

Then he pulled her down on to the chair beside him, and talked of the years to come and of their life together. They would travel, he said, they would go to Spain, to Sicily, to the Isles of Greece, to a hundred places.

And as she listened, she regained to some

extent her self-possession, but with it the old doubt returned. She hardly dared look up. Something had come to her and she had lost something. She would never be the same again. At the thought her face flamed with blushes.

Wareham stopped talking and watched her in silence. It seemed that he loved her now for her very coldness. Had she glowed to his fervour, he would have adored her equally, but he did not consider that. He told himself now that she was different from every other woman whom he had ever known. It was true she was colder—colder and more unapproachable. Yet her 'you are so splendid' gave him hope: she was simple truth to him.

But Kate was very weary with all that had come and gone. She drew herself away from him at last, stood up, and rested her arms on the chimney-piece.

'I think you must go now,' she said. 'I am so tired.'

'You haven't really given me my answer.'

'I know.' She shut her eyes for an instant. 'Forgive me, I can't—yet. Not quite yet. Come—to-morrow, before I go.'

'You are afraid.'

She nodded.

'You will be a greater woman, a greater artist than you are now when—you love.'

'Yes, yes.' She knew that, ah! did she not know that! 'Come to-morrow—to-morrow, not now—and I will tell you if I can.'

'Can—what?'

'Love.'

'It shall be as you wish.'

And yet he hesitated. It seemed as though he might be going to lose her when, for a brief moment, she had been his: it was a difficult thought to contemplate. Then he lifted her hand, stooped over it, kissed it, and went away.

Alone, Kate held on to the chimney-piece to steady herself: her faintness had increased, the walls about her rocked, it seemed: in the gilt-framed mirror above her, she saw the reflection of a frightened face. 'That was the face he kissed!' She shuddered at the remembrance, and hid her eyes in her hands.

Then tears came to her relief, such tears as she had never in all her life before experienced; her mouth and nostrils were full of the salt of them. Her whole body sobbed.

She grew gradually quieter, and the storm of her remorse subsided. Only she wanted to get away somewhere now and hide—for ever.

It was at this moment that Emma's little maid opened the door and announced a visitor.

'Please, Miss Kate,' she said, 'it's Mr. Alleyne.'

CHAPTER XXVI

KING OF THE WORLD

Lord Wareham's prolonged visit to King's Stratton had drawn comments even from his fellow-guests.

'That minx Lady Sarah!' whispered more than one lady.

But Mrs. Willoughby Fairfax had, with a perspicacity foreign to her, plumbed deeper waters. It was not Lady Sarah who drew her distinguished guest day after day from the junketings of the house party, but another, and that an entirely insignificant person. 'Imagine that little Kate aspiring to a title!' cried the good lady in the hearing of Mrs. Savile. 'My dear, those Souls are a dangerous family; they were born intriguing. First there was Miriam, now Kate!'

'Poor lost Souls!' said Millicent, with flippancy, as Mrs. Willoughby Fairfax considered.

But the truth was that Mrs. Savile, in thinking over recent events in connection with her friend Gervase, did not altogether regret them. 'Anything,' she thought, 'to get Kate Souls out of his way!'

Meanwhile, Gervase followed the routine of the days. The Secretary of State, his late chief, was staying in the house, and in addition to his visitors a good deal of work kept him occupied. He had secretly fallen back upon the rule of life advocated by Hassall, and the hours of prayer and silence that this entailed brought him a certain intermittent comfort. Yet it seemed as though he were losing his capacity for simple happiness; even peace when it came to him now was a battered thing, and won at the point of the sword. He never spoke of Kate—scarcely ever thought of her—so successfully had he cultivated the habit of detachment. That page in his life was closed.

But towards the end of the summer, when people had begun to drift away, and the dinner-table had grown small, Wareham's prolonged visit spoilt this triumph of self-discipline. Gervase began to desire London and a new session—he craved for occupation as for a drug.

A week later he heard that Lady Sarah's portrait was finished, and that Kate was leaving King's Stratton the following day. The ordinary demands of courtesy would compel him to visit her. He knew that he must call upon her, if not expressly to bid her good-bye, at least to see the picture, but he could not think of it only as a difficult duty. He loved Kate unreservedly, but in no sense did he feel it a temptation to be with her: this would have implied that he conceived the possibility of giving expression to his love. The sanctions which held them apart precluded any thought on that matter; and yet it appalled

him to discover how he flinched from any talk of 'him' or 'her' concerning Wareham and Kate. Fiercely he told himself that he had all the qualities of the born egoist. He was ready, it seemed, to condemn the woman he loved to a perpetual maidenhood, denying her to every other man because she was denied to him.

But here he took order with himself until he was schooled to the idea of Kate's marriage—Kate's inevitable marriage—and ready even, if need be, to congratulate her.

At this time he wrote long letters to Hassall, from which Brother Mark, as he was now called, drew his own inferences. Hassall was expected at King's Stratton shortly on a visit. Anxious to spend his yearly holiday alone with his old pupil, he had waited until the last guest should depart.

'It is hard to live well, sleep soft, and discipline the mind,' wrote Gervase. 'I believe that one touch of the rod on a bare back would do more than anything else to make one content with fate. Don't you think so? Even after toothache one is more satisfied with mere living.

'Scourging is a primitive remedy, but those who have tried it say that for discontent and bitterness of heart it is exceedingly efficacious. Do you remember the whippings of the Abbé Lacordaire? But, imagine such a thing nowadays! Conceive of—the Prime Minister, let us say—purifying his emotions in this manner in order that his crushing reply to the Opposition might be devoid of all trace of personal rancour! Imagine this a fact, a published item in the morning papers!

'And yet, why not? By comparison with the end attained, the means used would be indeed trivial.'

It was with such thoughts as these in his mind that Gervase went on his way to bid Kate Souls good-bye. He passed Wareham on the road, and the meeting gave piquancy to his reflections. Wareham probably had been on the same errand. The girl was leaving the next day. On what terms had they parted?

Gervase felt now that he was prepared for anything. And yet, when he actually stood in Emma's cottage, his impression was that he ought not to be there. The atmosphere into which he had broken was heavily charged with emotion. He saw the traces of tears upon Kate's face, and felt himself an intruder.

Ignoring her red eyes, however, Kate welcomed him with self-possession, showed him the portrait, and listened quietly, not greatly elated, to his appreciation. Their talk was easy and fluent: it skimmed the surface of many events: it was the talk of acquaintances rather than friends: it held no reference to parting or to any subsequent meeting.

And yet, as the conventional words came and went, they were both fully conscious how, in each, the strong currents of being set towards the other.

When Gervase turned to go, he felt such a parting to be a thing contrary to nature, and yet was prepared to accept it. It was Kate who dropped short of that stoicism. But then Kate

had no will to let him go. He said his last word; and, saying it, stood with feet so immovable that there seemed to be no need for her to stretch a detaining hand. But since the days of Eve, in such a crisis it is the woman who acts.

'Don't go, Gervase. I—want to tell you something.'

'What is it?'

'Lord Wareham has asked me to marry him. What shall I say?'

Gervase stood in silence, and was not ashamed to pray, as a man in a great danger. And yet, even when words came to him, they were indecisive.

'Why do you ask me about such things?'

'I have always asked you about such things. Am I to stop now? You have advised me all my life.'

'This is not a subject on which a woman needs advice. If you love him, you will know what to say.'

'But I don't love him—yet. I may in time. If I marry him I shall love him one day.'

'I cannot advise you in this matter. No, I cannot advise you.'

He stood there, manifestly tortured; but Kate was ruthless. She told herself it was the truth that she desired. And yet—for in her heart she knew already that he loved her—it was more than that. It was at the moment her very life, which had, it seemed, passed beyond her keeping, that she struggled to regain.

'Then you tell me to marry him, Gervase?'

Her voice pleaded like a song, in which was

contained the music and the weeping of a lifetime. 'Do you tell me that?'

For a moment Gervase stood silent. His head was full of broken petitions, and his heart paralysed.

'It would be the best,' he said quickly. 'I only want you to be happy. You will be very happy with Wareham: he is a good fellow.'

So, that was to be it! How quiet he was about it. She doubted now if he had ever loved her; certainly he did not love her as she would wish to be loved, with a passion unfettered by the conventions of the world, and regardless of them.

Pride helped her now, she drew herself up to her full height and looked at him calmly.

'Yes, that will be the best. Thank you. But —I feel that I ought not to have consulted you about this, after all. You don't understand. I am sorry. Good-bye.'

She even smiled as she added the conciliatory phrase with the whip in it—the inevitable whip wrought of a woman's humiliation. She proffered a cold hand. 'Good-bye.' 'He is afraid to love me,' she said in her heart; 'he is afraid of what people would say.' 'Good-bye.' For the third time she speeded him and smiled.

He looked at her dumbly, not loving her the less but wondering of what alien substance she was made, when, knowing all—he was positive that she knew of his love,—she could so deeply hurt him. He did not realise how centuries of captivity have forged for women invisible weapons. They know by an inherited instinct the vulnerable

places of a man's heart and, quick in retaliation, use their words upon it. He turned from her, wounded beyond thought.

Once out of her house he did not hesitate, but plunged into the woods : any path, so that it led away from King's Stratton, would serve him. After a while he grew insensible to his present pain, for now almost unconsciously — certainly without the concurrence of his will — his mind worked upon a new matter.

The truth was that it sought escape from the intolerable pass in which it found itself. He was like a man in a trap, who could neither stand up nor sit down, and who, in pondering the impossibility of a change of attitude, had for the first time become aware of an open door. Was this thing really an inevitable tragedy or only a difficult phantom created by his own narrow creed ? Many men and women would have thought a marriage with Kate justifiable, even without the special circumstances which made the barrier between them so unreal.

Now finally worn out with the wrangle, he ceased to think. He did not abandon his position ; he decided nothing. But with this letting go of thought, this momentary abandonment of the grip on clear unquestioning conviction, an impulse stronger than thought seized him, an impulse to go back to Kate, and, rightly or wrongly, to follow the law of his own being to its natural fulfilment. In his marriage with Miriam all that had seemed unlawful to his finer senses had been sanctioned freely by the Church and State : here it seemed as

though he loved under the benediction of the free heavens, and yet unlawfully.

This passion was no mere bodily desire, he told himself; this was an evolution of the soul that lifted him to an altitude, so that looking down he saw the world with its rules and conventions spread out before him as it might have been an ant's nest at his feet. Heaven was on his side. God—having made him what he was—had ordained the fulfilment of his life.

This position was not arrived at even during this, the last phase of the struggle, suddenly. He had wandered for some two hours, pushing through tangled undergrowth or pausing to look with preoccupied eyes on a blue distance. And in truth it was not really in these two hours that even this last battle had been fought. Each day, even while he struggled most, had brought him nearer to the end towards which nature, undisciplined, but healthy and in a sense even noble, urged him.

It was in a kind of glorious intoxication that he finally decided to lay waste the past, and build another and more human edifice upon its ruins.

The thing was settled now, as far as he was concerned: it was out of his hands. If Kate loved him, he was her man. If not—well, that would decide it. He imagined, indeed, that he left the issue open, but, had he known it, what he took for uncertainty was merely the tumult of anticipation.

He went back to King's Stratton dazed, bewitched, like a man walking in his sleep; he

dressed, dined, and talked more fluently than usual, in the same dream. Mrs. Willoughby Fairfax noticed that he drank more than was his custom, but forgave him for his added wit.

'I have never before felt so much inclined to say, Thank God for an amusing dinner, Gervase,' she said, patting his shoulder, as she passed into the drawing-room.

After dinner, on some easy pretext, he slipped out of the house. Gray mist covered the world; owls hooted, and the movement of dim stirring creatures passed among the laurels in the shrubbery. He strode along, taking a short-cut across the grass to the gates, and leaving a pathway in the dew. He drew in deep breaths of the night air: it seemed like new life. Never had he so realised himself—a man among men, a man among the friendly beasts around him, who were his kin, a man beneath the friendly stars above him, who were his kin also. To-night he was himself at last, 'captain of his fate, master of his soul.' He could have sung and shouted in a kind of triumph as he went.

There was a light in Emma's cottage. The blind had shifted, and he could see Kate sitting by the fire with a book upon her knee, her shoulders drooping, the long line of her body languid, her white hands idle upon her lap. He knew that by one word he could call them into life: he leant forward and tapped upon the pane.

'Kate,' he said in a voice that was strange almost to himself; 'it is I—Gervase. Come out to me. I want you.'

Then it seemed that she passed into his dream, or he into hers; which it was neither of them knew. He was conscious mostly of her clinging hands and the miraculous elation of his own spirit. He loved at last beneath the benediction of the heavens. This was indeed a sacrament. His whole being, soul and body, was at last at one.

'Kate—my love—for ever and ever!'

When the time came for parting she clung the closer to him, and wept, afraid of losing her bliss: she was a little child in his arms.

'Oh, Gervase, I am going away to-morrow!'

'I will come and see you the day after to-morrow. Dear love, what are you afraid of?'

'You might change—ah, you might, it is quite possible. They—people might tell you it was wicked to love me.'

He had no answer to make to this, but he threw back his head and laughed out loud, a laugh whole healthy and full of happiness. It was the first time he had laughed for nearly a year.

'Does that seem to be so absurd?' she asked doubtfully.

'Yes, what does it matter what people tell me? This is the best thing that I have ever done in my life.'

'Ah, yes, I know, I know,'—her arms were about him again; 'but, somehow—it is not like you to see it. I see it, mind! I should always see it. But even when you were quite a child you were always on the side of'— she hesitated.

'On the side of—what?'

'I can't find the word — law, I suppose.

I—I shouldn't like to make you less than yourself.'

'My love,' he answered simply, 'you have made me neither more nor less. You have made a man of me, and for what else was I put into the world?'

CHAPTER XXVII

MARK HASSALL INTERVENES

NEXT day Gervase drove her to the station. She had written her answer to Lord Wareham over night. Gervase knew that much, because, pleading a telegram which required his immediate presence in town, that young man had left King's Stratton as early as could decently be managed. Wareham had not confided in his friend, although apparently he had no suspicion of the real state of the case: his disappointment was enough occupation for his mind at the moment. Gervase wondered that Wareham had said nothing, for he felt as though his own changed aspect must blazon his secret to all the world. His life was flushed with exultation. There was no doubt in it now, and no hindrance even in his prayers. Only once did his joyful arrogance receive a check, and that, just as the train was starting, came from Kate herself.

He had told her that Mark Hassall was expected on the following day and her face had clouded.

'Oh, Gervase, will you tell him?' Kate knew

so well the fierce warfare that such a telling would imply.

'I must. Why not? Everybody will know now.'

There was nothing more for her to say. She could only wonder dumbly at his amazing radiance, and ask herself if he had, to any extent, counted the cost of what he was doing. But at the mention of Hassall's name she was overshadowed by a misgiving so poignant that she found herself upon the verge of tears.

'Can't you travel up to town with me now?' she said impulsively. 'There is so much to say —to consider. We haven't talked at all of ways and means. I—I can't bear to let you go like this.'

But he strained at the gnat of this minute temptation.

'I can't leave my aunt,' he replied, 'she will be at King's Stratton until to-morrow. Besides, I shall see you in two days. It is ridiculous,' he went on, 'but I don't mind your going now one bit. I almost want to be alone to understand more fully what has happened.'

'Good-bye then.' The guard whistled and waved the train into motion.

'My love,' Gervase whispered under his breath, leaning forward at the carriage window. 'My dear love!'

The reply in her eyes was all he could have wished it to be, although they were eyes haunted by an inexplicable fear.

But his present mood was not one for alarms :

he was buoyed up on the full tide of triumphant life and heedless of danger. He could conceive of no difficulty that might prove overwhelming. Kate, although not understanding the full power of the creed which Gervase held, knew better than he did the quarter from which those difficulties would come. For Gervase refused to believe in them. His soul was at last at peace and his conscience did not judge him. Doubtless, he told himself, the world, in ignorance of the facts of his case, would do so. But then it would judge ignorantly. Could it know everything, even as God knew everything, it would declare for him. So he argued with himself, although in reality he was living beyond the reach of argument. There is an entry in his diary, however, which shows that even at this time he was, in a sense, thoughtful.

September 26, 1906.—Men live by joy. Joy is, like sorrow, the central fact of the Christian creed, for it is the other side of sorrow. Joy in its entirety is only to be had when spirit becomes flesh, and flesh spirit.

These thoughts spring to my mind out of the circumstances that have befallen me. I cannot measure the extent of my joy at this moment. Heaven is here and now. God walks the earth, and I am free of any encumbrance of the flesh.

In comparing my present happiness with the distress which preceded it I realise that in great joy one's prayer should be for humility; in great sorrow for understanding. Understanding lessens the sting of sorrow, humility counteracts the drunkenness of joy.

May God grant me humility and obedience to His will—His true will—of which it needed joy to teach me the significance.

Next day Mark Hassall came.

Mrs. Willoughby Fairfax had left in the morning full of Gervase's praises: she had never seen him so youthful or so light-hearted.

'You were twice as old when you were only half your age!' she told him, laughing.

Mark Hassall also noted the change: but his old tutor had taken good stock of his lad and had arrived at conclusions before Gervase told him a word. He had not long to wait for the explanation. That same evening, sitting over their pipes in the little room in which they used to work together, Gervase told him the whole story.

Hassall was prepared for it and had his rejoinder ready, but he was not prepared for the resolution with which Gervase put his case. He treated it as a mere summary of facts brooking no argument.

Hassall felt his visit at this juncture to be one brought about by the merciful providence of God. In reality it was no coincidence. Gervase, imperatively in need of help, had written begging him to come to King's Stratton, but by the time he had arrived a revolution had taken place. Gervase no longer wanted support: therefore Hassall knew himself to be needed just so much the more. Gervase was ever in his thoughts, remembered and prayed for constantly. Hassall believed in the efficacy of prayer, and at this moment was quietly confident that in the forthcoming battle he would be victorious. He believed that his will in this matter was one with the will of God; he called faith in himself, faith in God; and stood, humanly speaking, in-

vincible. He had all the past behind him; he was armed by the weapon of the Church's law. Kate Souls might well tremble before such an adversary. Even as Mr. Money had sent Gervase straight into the arms of Miriam, so would this man, with such tremendous forces at his back, drag him away from the woman whom he loved purely and passionately with a love which his whole being could justify.

Gervase was constitutionally no weakling, not one to be pushed hither and thither by contrary winds of advice and representation. But his was a complex character and therefore open to diverse influences. He had little in common with that impermeable nature which, pushing a relentless way through the world, owes its very strength to its narrowness and concentration.

In telling his story, unconsciously he revealed himself, opening his mind to his friend as it were a book. And it was a mind after Hassall's own heart; a mind, high, loyal, and generous; the deep affection that he had for Gervase strengthened as he listened. But he was pitiless.

'Well,' said the young man when he had finished, 'what do you think?'

'I think that you are caught in the web of Maya—earthly illusion. You don't know what you are doing. May I put the position as I see it?'

'Of course.'

'Well then I take it that, in defiance of the decrees of God and of your Church, you propose to live with a woman who can never lawfully be your wife.'

'Lawfully! That is only a matter of time. This Parliament will almost certainly legalise such a marriage: the bill is expected to pass next year.'

'And can you honestly feel yourself to be set free by that bill when the Church will not recognise any such law?'

'My first marriage was no marriage.'

'The world has no reason to think so.'

'I don't care for the world.'

'Then the evil has worked deeply in you. You claim to be a follower of One who gave His life for the world! But you care more for the world than you know, for the world which will be against you is the whole company of Christian people, the great communion of the saints. It is not the bad Godless world that will cry out on you, but the good world in which your very being is rooted. And for the other—the Godless world—if you are not prepared to give your life to save that world you will only help to damn it further, be very sure of that. Whatever you do, you can't get away from the world by defying the Christian law.'

'That is not the point. I am not defying the Christian law. I am defying a law in which Christendom is divided; Roman Catholics and Jews——'

'Are obedient to the law of their own Churches. The law for the Christian is obedience to the decrees of his Church.'

'Don't interrupt me for a moment, Padre. I was going to say that I am defying a law on which Christendom is divided, not because I do not

believe in that law, but because, owing to my peculiar circumstances, I do not feel it to be binding upon me. I do not care for the opinion of the world, given in ignorance of the true facts of my case, which facts I cannot reveal, or, now that Miriam is dead, even prove, if I wanted to. Therefore I feel that this is a matter for me personally to decide, a matter that concerns only myself.'

'You are wrong. Nothing that a man does in this world concerns only himself. If you do this thing, Gervase, you will sin against the Church of all ages, past, present, and future. Think of the past—you will be disloyal to those dead saints who struggled to keep the Church's law pure in this matter, to all those councils and decrees that have pronounced upon it. You will be disloyal to the Church of to-day and on the side of her enemies. You will be disloyal to people whom you have never heard of, while at the same time you will have betrayed the trust of your near friends. And remember you are one who is set in the eye of the world. How will the religious life of your constituency be helped when it sees that its member is refused the communion of the blessed Body and Blood of Christ at the altar?' Here Gervase flushed deeply, and Hassall knew that his bolt had struck. He went on mercilessly. 'And lastly, you will have been disloyal to the men who will come after you. How can you bring up your children in the fear of God, when their very birth will have sprung from an act of treason to your faith? Can you expect them to be faithful

followers and servants of Jesus Christ when their own father is an apostate, a deserter from the ranks?'

The young man was silent, visibly shaken by Hassall's words, which had been delivered with the eloquence of a burning faith. Hassall watched the trouble, passing and repassing across his face, as a surgeon, with uplifted knife, might watch the symptoms of the patient on whom he is operating. Gervase was manifestly in acute distress. Then, using all the magnetic power which he possessed, reinforced by his deep love for his friend, Hassall leant forward, placing a hand on the young man's knee.

'My loved boy—almost my son, listen to me. I am cutting you to the heart with my words, but I am fighting in my Master's cause. I dare do nothing else. And—ah, forgive me if I hurt you even more. Bear with me further! But—your mother, Gervase, it is her cause too! What would your mother have decided in this crisis? Would she not have said that the highest life is that lived body and soul for God? That was your aim until quite lately—the aim of the hero and the saint. What has come to change it?'

With every new argument Hassall gained ground. Gervase could sit quietly no longer: he rose, pushing back his chair, and paced the room restlessly, as was his custom when much disturbed. Hassall's words were working in his soul like yeast, for he had that in him which, through heredity and education, answered to them as a dog to his master's whistle. His newly-found

joy in life had vanished like the dew of morning. He could not deny the cogency of Hassall's logic; he could only defy it, and in doing that he felt that he was doing violence to his own soul. God was no longer a father to him but a stern and pitiless judge. His defence came from him in a sort of cry.

'God has made me a man through the woman I love. If I have to sacrifice my manhood, why was it given to me?'

'The Christian finds fulfilment in sacrifice: that is his creed. Christianity is a faith in the broken body and the spilt blood. Sacrifice—the life laid down—that is its unique message for the world. Do you believe that?'

The abounding desire of the young man writhed in the chains of his inexorable faith. It seemed that his very physical health and strength revolted. And yet—he did believe it; for him it was the truth, the highest ideal of which he could conceive.

'I don't defy the Christian law of marriage,' he said, weakly returning to the first argument; 'but for me, with all that has gone before, I do not feel it to be binding. The sacrament of marriage rests as much with the people taking part in that sacrament as in the words spoken by the priest. I was deceived—trapped. Because of this sacrament, which is no sacrament, am I to sacrifice the happiness of two lives?'

'You could never explain such a situation to the world. Even if this marriage did not bind you—I take it that it does—but even if it did not,

you would have to sacrifice your personal happiness for the good of those to whom you could never tell the facts. Your secession from the law of the Church in this matter would do incalculable harm. God asks this sacrifice of you. He has singled you out for this honour. Much has been given to you: much will be required from you.'

'I can do no more.'

'So far you have done nothing. Your life has progressed smoothly, and no sacrifice has been demanded of you.'

'Has it not?' The shadow of a smile rested on the young man's lips as though he would say, 'How little, how little does one human being know the circumstances of another's life!'

'It was no sacrifice to you to forgive Miriam,' continued Hassall. 'With your instincts and training you could have done nothing less. This is the crisis of your life—the great opportunity for the great sacrifice. Are you going to meet it with the great refusal?'

'But—good God!' cried Gervase, goaded into desperation by his words, 'it is a sacrifice for a dream, a shadow of a dream!'

'It is a dream, a vision in which you will find God,' returned Mark Hassall, 'and you know it. That is why you are filled with such supreme anguish. All life is a dream and God the only reality. Happy are they who can say like St. Paul, "I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision."'

The struggle was nearing its end. Gervase, almost defenceless, made one last appeal.

'But there are many visions. I have only just become aware of the light of earth. I must find God through all good, pure, true, lovely human things, fireside and home, the love of wife and child? Why am I to be denied this? Why am I always to be an outcast? What have I done to have a punishment so terrible? It's no good, Padre, my whole life is before me. I can't wreck it now. I must live it out by the best light I have.'

'The light not of God but of an unholy passion for a woman! Do not be mistaken, if the light that is in you be darkness, how great is that darkness!'

But Hassall had gone too far. He had used more strokes than were necessary to hammer in his argument. Gervase knew that he was not fighting for an unholy passion for a woman, but for the cause of nature against the cause of law. That was all, but it was everything. In choosing the love of Kate he knew that he was choosing the lower life, the human before the divine; and in that life there would be much human happiness, but no speaking with God upon the mountain-top, and no need to veil his face from the multitude; for in that face, cheerful, contented, and mediocre, there would be no glory. Perhaps Hassall was right and this was indeed the 'great refusal.'

But he could contend no more to-night. He felt almost broken. Suddenly, impulsively, as he had often done when a boy, he turned upon his master.

'Padre, whatever I do, don't give me up. But

for her and you I am alone. God knows I'm rather a poor stick after all. I can't do this. It's too hard for me. I'm not worthy to do it. God must judge me. But do you pray—pray for me, and for her, and for all other miserable sinners outside the law, because we need it.'

Hassall grasped the young man's hand and wrung it. This was not the last word on the subject, he knew that well enough. The battle was very far from being lost.

'I will pray, my son,' he said quietly. 'All is in God's hands. Good-night.'

CHAPTER XXVIII

SHADOWS

The cloud of glory which had swept Gervase from the things of earth—or in Hassall's opinion from the things of heaven, blinding his eyes—had enveloped Kate also: but for her it was flecked through with an agony of mistrust.

Love demands to know and to be known. Anything short of this perfect understanding is a corroding distress. So Kate found it. She knew that there was a side to Gervase's nature which she could only guess at, from which might spring unimaginable events. She would not be safe until she had him always with her.

But these doubts only hung like vague shadows upon immeasurable joy, and as the minutes passed on to the hour when Gervase was to come to her again, the rapture of long delayed but untried love possessed her utterly. In that hour no fear could touch her.

The morning had passed quickly, but she had moved through it as one in a dream. It had been necessary to put her little house in order, to choose new flowers, to alter the position of chairs and

tables, and bring down pictures from the studio. She had not seen any of her friends since she parted from Gervase, for she had desired to be absolutely alone with her thoughts.

Now she plotted innocently to keep him as long as possible: they would dine together, she thought, and spend a long quiet evening. But when the hour struck and he came, all her thoughts vanished. She had no words even, no breath for words. She only felt his arms about her and his lips on hers.

And for Gervase the joy which he had found on that last night at King's Stratton awoke once more, and coursed like health through all his veins. He had grown morbid, he told himself, from long pondering, but now the touch of the woman he loved brought him sanity. As he kissed her, faith in the goodness of the world became inevitable, and laughter—the happy laughter of childhood—an easy thing. This was Kate—the princess of their childish games, the one woman of the joy and sorrow of his life. With a sort of sob he pressed her hands against his eyes, grateful even for the pain which had brought him such dear comfort.

Then there were the pictures to be seen. They went up into the studio and pulled out canvasses, laughing and criticising without any choice of words or consideration for the truth of random opinions. They turned Lady Sarah with her face to the wall: she was too life-like and reminded them of the far-off past of a week ago. Gervase discovered two little studies that Kate had made

at Fleurier's, and insisted upon bringing them downstairs to hang up in the dining-room. She protested that they were only working drawings, but he would not listen to her.

His assurance filled her with delight. It was *his* dining-room, of course, now; but that he should have recognised this so promptly set on a dream the seal of actuality. Kate was ready now to defy even Hassall.

But once in the domain of facts, they passed from the consideration of the dining-room walls to the house itself, which they both decided would do excellently as a town-house at least for the remainder of Kate's lease; and then on from that to the other subject hitherto so conspicuously avoided.

Was there ever a man, thought Gervase, who, asking a woman to be his wife, dreaded to hear her name the day? The shadow before which Kate flinched showed again in his eyes.

'I don't want to outrage the feelings of my neighbours more than I can help,' he said; 'and well—it may mean waiting some time, a year perhaps.'

'For the law to back us up?'

'Yes, the Bill is before the House now. This Government will probably pass it next summer.'

'Mr. Money will give us his benediction.'

'My dear, *no*—you don't understand. That will never happen. There will be no more benedictions in church for us. We shall be outside it all. But—it does not matter.'

Outside it all! She drew back in terror from

the depths of pain she saw foreshadowed in those words. Ever since the day when she had broken in upon his journey to Oxford she had known that these things had meant 'so much' to him.

These things, terrifying, compelling, and mysterious, had always stood between them. They stood between them now. Her terror grew until it forced her to his arms in an involuntary embrace. She held him to her, clutching him like a frightened child.

'Oh, Gervase, you are not sorry! You are not sorry!'

'No, dearest,' he reassured her; 'I am sorry for the first mistake that brought the trouble, that is all.'

'Miriam! Ah, how could you know?'

'My heart knew that I did not love her. But —don't let us talk about it now. It is very complex.'

'You suffered enough for it.'

'And you. Dear heart, we shall suffer more for this love of ours. It is something that we are prepared to suffer for.'

'Your voice sounded quite glad when you said that.'

'I am glad. That is what justifies us. We don't want to shirk any pain. In a way I feel all this to be a kind of toll to Fate. My happiness otherwise would be too great for a human soul to bear.'

There was no faltering here and she was soothed. But as she realised more and more the power of her love, she knew definitely that were

all the battalions of Heaven and Hell ranged against her, living she would not let him go.

He left her, promising to come again soon, but laughingly refused her dinner.

'I must go back to-night.'

'To Mr. Hassall?' she questioned distrustfully, looking at him with clouded eyes.

Mark Hassall was certainly at King's Stratton, but that was not the reason of his refusal. He explained at length, until her quick jealousy changed to wonder at such recognition of the conventionalities.

'You don't know what an independent life an artist's is? What do I care what people say? Why should you not stay and dine with me to-night, as you will next week when mother is here?'

'It is not all for oneself that we recognise social laws,' he said slowly.

'For who else then?'

'Society generally—the world. The world would misunderstand.' Suddenly he remembered that he was quoting Mark Hassall. The world, the world—it dogged him at every step! But on this point he was firm.

He bade her an oft-repeated good-bye, but left her a little bruised at heart that she had been denied. She walked upstairs slowly to her room, biting her lips. 'Nearly a year,' she thought to herself, 'a year of this uncertainty and wretchedness! No, it shall not be a year.'

Tears stood in her eyes, for the day so longed for had lost its glory. Still he had said definitely that he had done with priests and the cruel

restriction of religion — that was something! Kate felt her outlook on the world contracting under the influence of this passion; she was changing, growing jealous, even niggardly in her apprehension.

CHAPTER XXIX

'CHAOS OF THOUGHT AND PASSION ALL CONFUSED'

A CHILL conveniently following on his wishes kept Mark Hassall in his bed for two days, and in Gervase's company for two weeks longer than was intended: it was now arranged that he should remain at King's Stratton until Parliament met for the autumn session. The bitter words with which he had received Gervase's confidences were never repeated. The tide of his anger had receded, it appeared, leaving only the bedrock of his affection; and Gervase, during the disquietude of those days of transition, found that he was even glad of the company of his old master. Their minds were essentially at one: it was only on a single subject that they could not speak.

'It's like old times to see those two together,' said Bennett to Mrs. Milman; 'there they are of an evening sitting in the library over their books, just as if nothing like a marriage or a death had ever happened to disturb 'em.'

Mrs. Milman agreed; but although her access

to the library was more circumscribed than Bennett's, she saw further.

'Master Gervase is that nervous and broken down from politics and over-work that it's my opinion, Mr. Bennett, that something will happen very shortly if something isn't done. I don't believe he ever sleeps! There's a light under his door to all hours of the morning. And the night I got up to the cat kittening in the blue-room and screeching fit to kill herself, I passed the oratory and I saw him praying. A young fellow isn't right, Mr. Bennett, when he's praying at four o'clock in the morning. That's no time to approach the throne of mercy satisfactorily and with consequences.'

So thought Mrs. Milman, but although Gervase prayed, it was the consequences of such prayers that he feared. He could neither accept his love wholly nor refuse his religion. He carried the ascetic atmosphere of King's Stratton, with its denials and prohibitions—now strengthened tenfold by the presence of Hassall—to disturb Kate in London: he brought back the fulness of a hidden joy to break into the austere harmony of his home, and every day this double life grew more impossible. He felt ashamed of himself; and when a man arrives at that point he is in a perilous way.

At last he decided to let his intentions be known. Open warfare would be better than the skulking hypocrisy now laid upon him. He felt a traitor even when he read the lessons in church. Once let Mr. Money hear of the position of things at the Hall, and it would fall to the lot

of some one else to remind the village that Abraham begat Isaac, and Isaac begat Jacob, or that Methuselah lived to the age of nine hundred and sixty-nine.

But Kate fought desperately for secrecy. She knew well what her battle was to be; Gervase's love was for her, but against her were all the forces of Heaven and the world, for this occasion temporarily united. She would not abandon a single point of vantage until she saw that his happiness was involved. Then grudgingly she gave him—Emma.

'Tell mother,' she said; 'but you will find it difficult enough.'

'And Lady Brereton? Ah, dearest, let me tell Lady Brereton. She has been so good, almost a mother to me.'

Slowly the girl gave way. His salvation lay in speech, and speech was necessary for the relief of his tense disquiet; but it was unimaginable bitterness to her to open such doors of influence.

He found it, as she had said, difficult enough. Lady Brereton, unlike Mrs. Savile, had had no suspicions, and she listened to him in a dismay which she did not attempt to disguise. That Kate was no relative to him by blood she granted, that his marriage was no sacrament she denied. He was too sick at heart to contradict her, or even to tell her the truth about Miriam Souls, for this news alone had blanched Lady Brereton's cheeks and brought the tears into her dear eyes, tears which frankly overflowed.

'Oh, Gervase, think, before it is too late!

Don't cut yourself off from all the people who love you! It is terrible. My dear, I was at your mother's wedding—that was a true marriage, if ever there was one. I can't go on, but, believe me, Gervase, we are poor things outside God's laws!'

He listened sadly as she concluded. 'If Kate Souls really loves you she will not let you do this: love demands the best—the very best—of a man, or it is not love.'

After Lady Brereton had gone, one commonplace phrase remained with him, 'Think before it is too late.'

Think! Great Heaven, he did nothing but think! He was maddened with thinking, and he could not disguise the fact from Kate: that was the worst of all. He had discussed the matter with her almost to irritation.

Emma gave no help to either of them. She was properly indignant. The thought of such an alliance struck at the foundations of her respectable creed. She had no religion but in the Establishment, no hope outside a rigid social convention: without enough belief in a God to become even an agnostic, she pinned her faith securely to a bishop's apron. As with Gervase no man might stand ultimately between his soul and the law of God, so with Emma no God might stand ultimately between her soul and the law of man.

Thus time passed, and see-sawing, faltering, overcome at one moment by the ecstasy of a perfect love, at another by the agony of a betrayed

trust, Gervase lived in a very hell of his own making.

It had become clear that in marrying he and Kate would find themselves social pariahs. They would scarcely be able to continue to live at King's Stratton. And as for Parliament, what would Harboard, that stronghold of Liberal Churchmanship, say of a member who held the Church's law in such contempt?

The tide of love could not overflow these rocks, they acted as a breakwater against which the oncoming waves were dashed to pieces. It was impossible to tell what would happen. Gervase's apprehension grew. He feared to tell Mr. Money of his apostasy; he feared Lady Brereton; he feared Emma; he feared everybody in the place. His unspoken, almost unformulated desire now was to resign his seat in Parliament, give up all work, and go abroad.

Was that what Hassall had meant by the great refusal?

The thought shook him. He remembered all that he had hoped to achieve: old ideals rose before him, old vows, old hopes. He had meant to be a warrior in the cause of righteousness, a warrior against all commercial dishonesty and social oppression, a happy warrior not holding his own life too precious. And now—ah, the irony of the thing!

Thou to wax fierce
In the cause of the Lord,
To threat and to pierce
With the heavenly sword!

Anger, and zeal,
And the joy of the brave
Who bade thee to feel?
Sin's slave!

The words from *Lyra Apostolica* had a new meaning to him now.

He longed impatiently for Hassall to leave King's Stratton; Hassall held the chain which linked him to the past, and it was the past that bound him.

But when the day for his departure came, their good-byes were unexpectedly precipitated by a telegram from Kate, who, having finished a picture sooner than she had expected, had a free day, and desired Gervase to come to her. He explained the situation to Hassall, and asked his permission to leave King's Stratton even before his guest. He knew that sooner or later Hassall would bring up the subject of his relations with Kate: the problem was painfully alive in the minds of each, therefore he was almost glad to be beforehand with him, and to mention her as boldly as he could. Hassall's expression did not change: it was almost as if he had expected Gervase to speak.

'There is only one thing,' he said after a short silence. 'Before I go I want you to allow me to read you an extract from a speech by Archbishop Temple.'

'What has Archbishop Temple to do with me?' asked Gervase uneasily. His fighting power seemed to have deserted him.

'This speech was delivered many years ago,'

Hassall went on quietly, 'and it deals with the subject we were discussing the other night. Will you allow me to read it?'

'Certainly, if you wish to.'

Hassall pulled a paper out of his cassock pocket.

'Here it is. I copied it. It describes what he conceived to be the true idea of the marriage law.'

'Is it really necessary to read it?'

'I would like to.'

'Then go on.'

Events, and the perpetual working of his mind, even in sleep, had brought to Gervase a sense of culmination. It seemed as though some final winding up was near at hand.

'It is a description of home life,' continued Mark Hassall, 'the principle of the divinely instituted marriage law.

'"The principle begins with the consecration of the family,"' he read in a low sympathetic voice. '"The purpose is to guard and defend the household—to consecrate a circle within which there shall be the warmest, strongest, deepest affection without the slightest touch or breath of passion. When one of this consecrated family marries he brings in the wife under the same consecration, because she is to find in her husband's father and mother a new father and mother, and in her husband's brothers and sisters new brothers and sisters. And she too should be a consecrated thing in their eyes.

'"So too when a daughter marries, the husband finds in her father and mother a new father and

mother, and in her brothers and sisters new brothers and sisters, to be sheltered and encompassed by this consecration founded on the Divine law."' Hassall's voice dropped into silence. 'You don't believe this, Gervase?' he said almost in a whisper.

But Gervase was not in a state to reply, for the turning point had been reached.

'You don't believe this, Gervase?'

'Oh my God, yes, I believe it. But—I can speak no more about these things.'

'Gervase, I have so deep an affection for you that I must speak—and you must listen to me if only for the sake of all the happy years that we have spent together.'

'Go on then. But don't expect anything from me. What a mockery to speak to one maimed and broken as I am, of this consecrated family life! It is not for me—and by no fault of mine.'

'A family life—no. But a consecrated life was yours at the beginning, and may be yours until the end: only it means sacrifice, and in your case sacrifice of the family tie. Remember, Gervase, "He that loveth father or mother more than Me, is not worthy of Me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than Me, is not worthy of Me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after Me, is not worthy of Me."'

There was no reply. Hassall watched him and continued—

'There will be no consecrated family life for you, Gervase, because for you there is a higher path marked out—even the King's Highway of

the Cross. The heights are always lonely: the crucified figure stands the highest and the loneliest —forsaken even of God. And yet it is the crucified alone who can draw all men.'

Where before Hassall's words had dropped pointless they now pierced only too surely the vulnerable parts of Gervase's armour. Time had fought Hassall's battle for him. Never had Gervase so realised the personal power, the magnetism of the central figure of his religion. His religion was the adoration of a Person—a Master. Gervase had betrayed that Master. He felt now that he himself might have been one of the men who had killed the Christ.

It was as though Hassall answered his thought.

'My son, we must either do ill in his world, it seems, or suffer it—kill or be killed. God grant that you may not refuse the death of the Cross. There is no Christian worthy the name, whose natural life is not a crucifixion, and whose spiritual life is not lived in the eternal joy of that sacrifice. You are running away from your crucifixion, even as St. Peter ran from his, and to you both has been vouchsafed the vision of the Master. Do you remember the words, "Lord, where goest thou?" and the answer, "To Rome, to be crucified afresh." Gervase, I ask a very little thing of you. Will you pray with me for this last hour before I go? Will you pray for yourself, and for this woman whom you would wrong so grievously. You may not hurt the creature you pray for. Will you pray that she may be granted the vision of the soul—spiritual eyes that can discern the

truth. And pray too that she, and you with her, may find your happiness in God, from whom alone true joys may be obtained.'

There was no answer, so without another word Hassall led the way to the oratory, and Gervase, after a moment of hesitation, followed. Hassall knelt beside his friend and prayed as he had never prayed before, for he believed that a soul hung now in the balance between heaven and hell.

Gervase only knew one prayer, one word, 'God! God! God!' and in that invocation there were held two opposite petitions—that God might give to him his heart's desire, and yet, if need be, that He might withhold it. The Christian soul had found its Gethsemane, and its prayer but followed the type of every prayer in such a case.

'"Father, all things are possible unto Thee; take this cup away from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what Thou wilt!"'

The struggle was nearly over. An hour passed, two hours, three hours; and still he knelt on, clinging to his prayer as a drowning man might cling to a raft.

A servant with a telegram knocked at the door. Hassall rose silently, looked down at the kneeling figure, and took upon himself to open it.

'There is no answer,' he said after a moment of hesitation. Then he was told that the carriage waited for him, but he remained firm. 'Take my luggage back,' he said to the footman; 'I will stay here for another night.'

So the hours passed—luncheon was served in the dining-room, and then quietly removed, for

there was no one present—until the day drew in towards the early dusk of autumn.

Then Gervase lifted his head. He put out his hands and pulled himself unsteadily to his feet. He did not stand straight, but swayed for a moment like a drunkard. His eyes, which had an odd gleam in them, were like a drunkard's eyes—veined and red, while his face was drawn as an old man's.

'You have conquered, Padre,' he said in a low voice. 'I will not go back to her.'

CHAPTER XXX

IL N'Y A DE VRAI QUE L'AMOUR

When Kate received no answer to her second telegram she was all for journeying to King's Stratton. But the thought of Hassall's presence there forbade her. She was beside herself. She pictured an accident, Gervase killed, as his father had been, hunting—no, she knew that for a deception. That was not the reason why he had failed to come to her. She shut her eyes to the reason, although she had divined it. But no word, no reply! It was unlike him.

Restlessness gained upon her: her brain grew heated, and she hardly knew what she did. She put out her canvas and paints, but spent the greater part of the day wandering from one room to another. She could not control her thoughts. 'He has left me,' she repeated to herself, while her mind worked at probabilities. 'He has left me; I knew he would. There is no world for me any more.' Then it seemed as though the walls closed in upon her and the ceiling lowered. She put on her hat and ran out into the streets. They were filled with meaningless faces: carriages jingled by

with people in them who looked comfortable and complacent, people who had never lived—as she had lived once ; or died—as she was dying now.

She turned into the Park, where brown flickering leaves fell tumbled by the wind. It was keen, she felt it freshening her burnt red cheeks.

She passed across the grass to the round pond where boys sailed their boats ; but the dusk was falling as she returned. Her thought, it seemed, had stopped. She sat in the studio quietly, with her hands resting in her lap, until her evening meal was served. Afterwards she went at once to bed.

She lay still for a long time. Carriages passed ; there were women in those carriages who had married men they did not love in order to be rich, but no priest would say that their marriages were illegal, no priest would denounce them and refuse to allow their husbands to approach the Sacrament. Thought had awakened now, but she lay rigid. She could not relax. Her eyes stared into the darkness. Where was Gervase ? Praying ? Yes, she knew he was praying for strength to slay her with a word. Praying to God ! The thought hurt her. She was jealous of that prayer that took him from her. She was jealous of God.

The morning found her in a like condition, but stiff with weariness, for she had not slept. At her usual hour she rose, bathed, and dressed. There was a letter on her breakfast-table. She had expected it, and yet her heart stopped beating. She picked it up, handled it, and ran her fingers round the edge. She was afraid to open it. It brought her a strange and terrible romance, that attracted

with a menace. Then she felt her love surging through and around her like a great tide, in which she could make no way. That was her lover's handwriting. Ah, how much she loved him! She would trust him in the face of all adverse circumstances. Her misery had been but a foolish mistake over which one day they would both laugh. Here was the letter of explanation. The thought brought her a sceptical comfort: tears flooded her eyes, tears, hitherto held back by stark misery. She sat with her unopened letter in her lap. 'I will trust him,' she said, 'I will trust him.'

Then she took courage and broke the seal.

The letter was as follows :—

KING'S STRATTON,
October 6, 1906.

Oh, my love, forgive me the pain I am causing you. God's laws are inexorable : I know it now. We must part, and when we come to die, I think we may be glad. We must not see each other again, Kate. I cannot write more. I am like a madman now, denied the healing sanity of your presence, an eternal wanderer in sight of home.

Always, beloved, in this world and in the next, with my body and with my soul, YOUR LOVER.

Kate put the letter down quietly. She knew the worst now, and that knowledge was almost ease after the suspense. It brought her within touch of her lover's grief, and made her own the more tolerable.

She poured out her tea and broke a piece of toast in a curious callousness. Then, while she had

yet the strength, she made a resolution. 'I will live this down. It will be better for him to give me up—much better. It will hurt me soon, I know it will hurt me, but—I will live it down. I will be happy in spite of him. I will—I will be happy! I have my art now—all the world—all the world—the glorious happy world.'

And then—poor soul!—it seemed as though she understood for the first time the meaning of what had come to her. The suspended interval was over. She sat down suddenly upon her couch, and rocked backwards and forwards in the overwhelming agony of her grief. The pain of this parting had passed into her body, until it was in her very flesh that she felt the severance.

The next days passed in alternating moods of stupor and wild misery. At the end of the week her soul rose in revolt and she knew definitely that she would not silently accept this decree of renunciation forced upon her, this canon of an alien creed. She must see Gervase once more, if it were only to bid him good-bye.

Having made up her mind, she wrote a letter:

SOUTH STREET, W.
October 10, 1906.

My love, I think that you have broken my heart. But I must see you again. I can bring you no comfort, for I am distraught by the agony of this parting. If it had been death I could have borne it better, because then we should have been at least of one mind.

As it is I cannot see why we are separated. A marriage which is right in other Christian countries for

men of the same faith as ourselves cannot be a sin in this country. God is one God. Is it some tribal deity you worship, who only rules in England and through the bishops of the Church of England, or the great God of all men and of all religions? You talk of His law: where is His law? Is it in Leviticus or in the Councils of your little branch of His Church, or in our own hearts? Were we Jews or Roman Catholics, this law would not divide us.

And what is this sacrament of marriage after all? It seems to me it covers a multitude of sins, and that through it women may be sold into marriage as much as ever they were sold to slavery. Yet no one cries out at that.

I cannot understand! Because some words were once spoken over you and Miriam, you tell me we must never see one another again. It sounds to me like madness. Oh, my love, come to me—to say good-bye at least. Gervase, you owe me that, for I have loved you with all my life, as much as any woman ever loved a man since the world was made. Come directly you get this —to-morrow. KATE.

That letter brought him to her feet: he was a man, and he loved her: he could not have done otherwise. But he came strung to the difficulty, knowing well what he was facing.

She was lost to everything but the dear joy of having him with her once more: the delight of this one day was enough to blot out the suffering of the past, to blot out even the arid desert of the years that stretched before them.

They did not argue: no arguments were left. They kissed one another and wept as lovers who were to die that night.

'Listen, Gervase,' Kate said when she could

find speech, 'give me this day out of all our lives —just this one day to be happy in. You may have all the rest, but give me to-day. We will not talk of difficult things, or even think, we will just be happy.'

He could not deny her. And indeed after such a conflict he was weary for a little happiness. It would do no harm, he thought, to grant such a request, and—he shuddered to think of it—it was the last which she would ever make to him.

They lunched together and drank their coffee in the studio. They spent the afternoon in looking over sketches, reading scraps of well-known and loved poetry, and in the happy give-and-take of talk. But all the time they knew that the hour was drawing nearer ; even then the knife was ready to fall.

When the shadows grew so deep that it was not possible to discern the outline of the 'Ariadne' against the wall, Gervase drew Kate to him so that her fair head sank, as it had often done before, upon his shoulder. He touched her hair with tremulous hands. 'My love, my love,' he murmured brokenly. Even his pain had grown sweet to him. The day was dying—dead ; the moments were slipping by one by one : he knew that he must soon face the parting, the terrible life-long parting that waited for him in the evening ; and with every minute that passed it seemed to grow more impossible. The shadows turned to blackness, but he did not go ; his brain grew hazy and his limbs weighted. Then, in a kind of alarm at so losing the mastery of himself, he drew away from her

almost sternly, becoming on the instant a stranger and remote.

'Dearest, I must go now. I must not wait longer. We knew it had to come. And now surely the sooner the better. Do not let us prolong this pain.'

His voice sounded, even to himself, unnatural. With a quick, frightened cry at his change of manner, Kate turned.

'You are angry with me. What have I done?'

'Oh, nothing, nothing! But—' he continued in an agony, 'let me go, my love, before it becomes impossible.'

Fear and love had the girl now entirely, and she clung to Gervase in a spasm of apprehension. She had no ideal of sacrifice by which to lift her conduct; she had only her love for him, to which she was disastrously constant.

'You can't leave me like this! Oh, Gervase, you can't! You said that you would give me a whole day and stay to dinner! You refused me that once. Will you refuse me again—now?'

Then in a sudden passion of sobbing she flung herself into his too willing arms.

The touch of her mounted to his brain and stole his senses. He knew nothing, saw nothing, realised nothing but the woman he loved. She was very near to him; he felt her in his arms like fire. There came to him the far-off echo of a command from another world, and he answered it with empty words. 'I must go, I must go.' He knew that the phrase meant nothing, but he kept repeating it.

Kate's tears were mingled now with breathy sobbing laughter, which held no mirth but rather a terrified joy.

'Oh, love, love, and can you go?'

For one brief second that far-off world of past resolutions and past promises loomed dimly; and, mechanically obedient to his part, he undid the clinging arms.

'I must.'

It was only for a second. Kate leant against the wall where she had fallen helplessly. Her limbs seemed lifeless, her arms down-dropping, with the tired hands a little turned. She drew him to her with an inexorable witchcraft. All romance was there in that throbbing yet quiescent woman's figure—legend, song, the sound of armies, and the scent of field-flowers. She was the sum of the world to him, the poetry, the music, and the magic of all the earth.

'Ah, Gervase, and can you go?' She raised beseeching lids, and her eyes were dim.

He knew his answer, and strained her in his arms with a quick cry. His lips had a new message for her now. And she, her brain clear and her love omnipotent, felt only a woman's pride in her submission to the man she loved, and gloried that it should be so.

Night fell at King's Stratton, but its squire did not return.

CHAPTER XXXI

LADY BRERETON HAS AN IDEA

The 'season of mists and mellow fruitfulness' passed into the sterility of late November, and the birds took their autumn toll of flaming berries. At all periods of the year King's Stratton was, to the indulgent eyes of its lovers, the most beautiful place in the world, and now the wood-walk, with its clean, leafy carpet that shifted with the wind, and grey-green boles of beeches, its patches of fungi—scarlet and orange—its covering roof of delicate tracery making a filmy cobweb against the sky, seemed to Lady Brereton, as she strolled through it late in the afternoon, to be unparalleled in its loveliness. Gervase was in London, for the autumn session was well on its way; but Lady Brereton had walked over from Weybourne to see Mrs. Milman, and to gather what news of him she could. It was not much; he had suddenly become inexplicably shy of his neighbours, and his apparent desertion of her had caused Lady Brereton, to whom the past and her close friendship with the desolate little lad were still vivid, a moment of poignant regret. Marion never spoke of Gervase

now, but she followed the debates in the House of Commons with regularity. She had lost the first freshness of girlhood. Her life pursued its limited round peaceably, and although it was broken by no dazzling happiness, it held no unbearable heart-break either. Her days were too sheltered and her hours of duty and of pleasure too carefully regulated for that. There were no seeds of rebellion within her heart such as in other young women of her type occasionally burst the bars of cheerful English conventionality. Marion brought a good deal of happiness to the poor of King's Stratton. 'A sight for sore een,' the old people of the place called her, as she passed up and down among them, reading to the bed-ridden, nursing the sick, and playing with the children, as her mother had done before her. 'Miss Marion's the wife for the squire!' one old woman declared emphatically to Lady Brereton; 'she's the wife for him, though he's nobbut a man after all! My sake's alive, he might have had the best for the asking, and he chose the worst, and that's what a man does every breathing minute. Perhaps it's ordained so, or what 'ud be the sense of a better land? We'd have no use fur it, my lady, if we all got our deserts here below! And, any way, up there they are bound to keep the peace, an' so they don't allow no marriages whatsoever, and that's a wise precaution.'

After Lady Brereton had turned out of the wood-walk—she had stopped more than once to enjoy the crisp colour of the leaves in the misty distance and the keen, clear scents of autumn—

she passed into the high road, where she was overtaken by Mr. Money and a young man, whose acquaintance she had made years ago at that very place, and had afterwards renewed in London. Both she and Marion always found Jack Denham pleasant company. He had a good wholesome taste in literature and art, which fitted in admirably with Marion's ideas and education. They went to the Academy together, chaperoned by some common friend, and lent each other books.

Lady Brereton was delighted to hear that he was staying at the Rectory with Mr. Money.

'Won't you both come up to dinner to-night?' she said cordially. 'Sir James will be so pleased to see you. You always manage to make him laugh, Mr. Denham; and he is very sad indeed at present, for the doctor has forbidden hunting. No hunting on any consideration! Sir James simply can't bear it, for the winter just meant hunting to him and nothing else! He is shut in the house, a companion to poor Peter. Do come in and see them both as often as ever you can, Mr. Denham: it will be such a charity! Marion! Oh yes, Marion is quite well, thank you, and very busy with a cantata which she is getting up at the girls' club. She also will be delighted! To-night, yes! Good-bye, Mr. Money; I can't walk as fast as you do! Au revoir, both.'

As she dressed for dinner that night Lady Brereton reflected cheerfully that she had now two guests to relieve the monotony of the family meal, also she resolved to get a little private talk with

Mr. Money on the subject of Gervase Alleyne. But it was a bad time for speculation. Sir James always insisted upon keeping the door of his dressing-room ajar, so that he might shout to his wife any idea, information, or question, as it occurred to him while dressing. When she missed his meaning, as she very often did—for the remarks came to her not only through a half-open door but very often stifled by a towel, a sponge, or the passing of two energetic hair-brushes—Kitten was aggrieved.

'You haven't any ears for me, Pippin!' he shouted to-night at the top of his voice.

'Don't be angry, James!' Lady Brereton screamed in reply. 'Ruth was just buttoning my dress. She is going in a moment. Do say it again!'

'Oh no,' returned Sir James haughtily. 'Of course I can't expect you to take any interest in my affairs!'

Whereupon Lady Brereton dismissed her maid, and spent the next few moments in her husband's dressing-room in apologies and conciliation. This sort of thing happened every night, with variations; but to Sir James it came always as a perturbation and a surprise.

'Poor dear Kitten,' said Lady Brereton to herself, as she rustled down the staircase, 'of course he is irritable, with no hunting! Some men have to give up everything!'

She found no difficulty after dinner in carrying Mr. Money off to a quiet corner, for Jack

Denham monopolised the rest of the party with universal satisfaction. Shouts of laughter reached her, where she sat by the fire in the inner drawing-room, with the cheery Rector opposite to her toasting his back before the flaming wood-logs. As she looked up at him an apt phrase of Peter's came to her suddenly, 'Mr. Money is such an odd mixture of beef, bridge, and Benedicite.' It was quite true; the Rector had shown ample appreciation for the Weybourne beef, and in a few minutes Marion would be sure to command him for bridge. But now it was her moment, and she longed for news of Gervase.

Mr. Money knew now what Emma and Lady Brereton had been aware of for some time, that the young man was only awaiting events connected with Parliament before making his engagement with Kate Souls public. But Lady Brereton, who hitherto had avoided the subject, now seemed eager to discuss it. The Rector concluded that something must have transpired.

'Have you heard anything of Gervase lately, Mr. Money?'

'No, my dear lady. He was so anxious to anticipate my cold shoulder that he has taken himself off for good it seems, silly boy!'

'That is exactly what I want to talk of! He has done the same thing to me. He answers my letters on post cards with an apology and no news. What have we done, you and I, that we should be treated as though we cared about him no longer?'

'He is ashamed of himself,' said Mr. Money

shortly, 'that's what it is. He won't let us have the chance of giving him the go-by.'

The Rector's conversation certainly lacked the fine shades.

Lady Brereton drew back. 'Oh, Mr. Money, how impossible!' she said under her breath.

'Not at all, not at all impossible. Honestly, I don't know how I should stand towards him afterwards. I am exceedingly fond of Gervase, as you know, but—he will have to resign his place on the committee of the Anglican Churchman's Union and all the other things he was keenest on! What is to be done?'

'I don't know!' said Lady Brereton sadly. 'But—but—oh, don't let us consider what is to be done *afterwards*! Can't we prevent it now?—that is the question. The consequences are so overwhelming.'

Mr. Money shook his head.

'My dear lady, you might just as well talk of consequences to a hypnotised guinea-pig. Poor chap! How he has smashed up his life, to be sure, and those two women have helped to smash it!'

'Who would have imagined that those unassuming Souls could bring such wreckage!'

'It wasn't only the Souls,' said Mr. Money, 'it was Gervase himself and the position of the stars. But Gervase mostly. What could you expect! Here is a man with a lot of the ascetic in him and a strong dash of the poet; add to that a violent temperament, for he has everything in a superabundant degree, and what can you get but disaster?'

'No!' Lady Brereton would not allow that. It presupposed a fatalism for which she was not prepared. Besides, she was a conventional woman, and the temptation to lay the blame on the unconventional woman was too strong to be resisted. 'No,' she said again, 'it was not Gervase himself, and the stars have nothing whatever to do with it. It was the Souls. If it hadn't been for the Souls he would have married—' there was an imperceptible pause, owing to an intruding thought in which her own Marion was involved, then she hurried on—'married, and settled down happily at King's Stratton. It was the Souls entirely, first Miriam and now Kate.'

'My dear lady,'—Mr. Money smiled his usual smile,—'they may have been the spark, but where was the tinder? And I think as a matter of fact you are rather hard on them both. Of course Miriam was a baggage with the brains of a suet dumpling, but Kate——'

'I don't want to be unfair to Kate,' interrupted Lady Brereton. 'Kate is self-willed, but to be just she is not really a bad woman. And she is a great artist. I suppose it is this terrible artistic temperament that one reads so much about, the sort of thing that smashes all order to follow its own impulse. I am so thankful that Marion is quite normal. No, Kate is terribly selfish; but she is not a bad woman at heart. I don't believe that she knows what she is doing. Don't you think that if you explained the situation to her, and all it meant to Gervase, she might understand?'

'Not me!' said Mr. Money. 'If you explained it, she might. She hates me!'

'Does she?' said Lady Brereton doubtfully. 'Why?'

'She thinks that all parsons are in league against her—so they are!' he added with a laugh. 'The world would be topsy-turvy if there were many Kates in it.'

'Yet Kate has qualities,' said Lady Brereton, looking at him steadily. 'She would be capable of a great sacrifice!'

'Of course she would! Why, bless my soul, and so would Gervase! And you see what they make of it between them! They are quite ready for sacrifice, but they won't sacrifice one another. Let us sacrifice the world—hang the world, let it all go!—evil report, good report, position, influence, power, success, wealth—overboard with the whole lot, so that we have each other! Sacrifice—if you are on sacrifice, let heaven go too, this world and the next! Sacrifice! Oh, don't let a soul, or two, or three, or a dozen, stand in the way, or even—God!'

Lady Brereton was half frightened. 'That is a very big thing when you put it like that,' she said slowly; 'it makes what they have done seem splendid, almost——'

'Almost right. I know.' Mr. Money altered his position, his back was now thoroughly warmed, and he tumbled into an easy-chair. 'That's the glamour of sacrifice—the glamour, in fact, of all promiscuously applied virtue.'

'Oh,' said Lady Brereton suddenly, 'what *is* truth?'

'For us little people it lies in keeping the law, and leaving impossible ideals alone. Dear lady, Sir James is looking this way; oughtn't I to go and play bridge?'

'No, no, one minute! Do you know I have been thinking that if I went up to town and saw Kate——'

'No good! She'll never give him up. I tell you she will sacrifice every one but him, everything but their love.'

'But—oh, don't you see she is sacrificing him now. I shan't ask her to save herself, but him. I shan't ask her to sacrifice their love, but to use it. Real love could never hurt a man as terribly as this will hurt Gervase.'

Mr. Money had risen from his chair to join the other group; but he now stood still, considering her words.

'Women are very clever,' he said after a moment; 'I never thought of that. Of course it's true. You may succeed on that line of argument. Tell her to stop loving him, and you're done; but tell her to go on for his sake to all the heights of abnegation, and—well, you may succeed. Try.' Then rousing himself from the train of thought into which her words had led him, he looked round once more into the inner room. Jack Denham was expounding a card-trick to Marion and Sir James. Seeing he was not wanted for the moment, Mr. Money returned to her.

'By the way, do you know that young man?' He jerked his head backwards.

'Mr. Denham?'

'Yes. He came into quite a lot of money the other day by the death of his uncle. Not half bad, is it? Didn't you hear?'

'No,' said Lady Brereton. 'We have been very quiet down here, and somehow I never do hear those sort of things. His uncle! But isn't this a little involved? Oughtn't he to be Lord Winterthorpe?'

'Mr. Money shook his head.

'No, there's another uncle to go first, but that one is eighty-seven, just a year younger than Lord Winterthorpe was. So in all human probability Jack will be "in at the death." I was very glad to hear it,' the Rector continued naively. 'Jack's a good fellow, a very good fellow indeed! Ah, they want me now! That blessed card-trick is finished—a ridiculous thing; a baby could see through it! Coming, Sir James, coming! You'll excuse me, Lady Brereton?'

Every young man appears to the careful mother in the light of a possible husband for her daughter; but it was only in the last two minutes that Lady Brereton had even given serious thought to Mr. Jack Denham. Marion's husband must be before all else what her mother described as a 'good man.' On that point Lady Brereton's conviction was unalterable. The 'kind heart' was, she knew well, so much more than the coronet; still—there was no denying this—the kind heart plus the coronet must inevitably weigh heavier than it did alone. As it was, Marion obviously liked Mr. Denham, and, upon reflection, the circumstance did not displease Lady Brereton.

But she put all these thoughts, absorbing as they were, into a far-off corner of her mind, reserving them for future consideration, and returned to the affairs of Gervase Alleyne. She drew out her knitting, for the quick click of the pins helped the working of her brain.

When Mr. Money came up to bid her good-bye her plan was ready.

'I will see Kate Souls next week,' she said decidedly.

'Next week!' The Rector looked at her in surprise. 'Why put it off? Surely a thing like that should be done at once. Next week will be too late. Couldn't you go up to town to-morrow?'

Lady Brereton hesitated. 'No, not to-morrow. I can't leave home at present. I am wanted here. But I will go next week. Please remember me and —and all concerned—in your prayers. Good-bye. It was a lucky chance that I met you to-day. Good-bye, Mr. Denham. Yes, Marion is quite free and will be delighted to ride to-morrow. Have you arranged it with her? I am so glad. Au revoir!'

CHAPTER XXXII

For every evil under the sun
There is a remedy—or there is none.

Lady Brereton came to town not without misgivings, but with many a rehearsed argument ready to her lips.

She was, however, not prepared for the reception that awaited her. Kate listened calmly, judged the case, weighed, pondered, but kept her own counsel. Once or twice she asked a question.

'If Gervase marries me why will he be obliged to leave Parliament?'

They had been talking now for over an hour.

'Harboard would never consent to be represented by a man who notoriously broke the Church's law.'

'But if Gervase remains in Parliament he will help to get the law altered for other unfortunate people!'

Lady Brereton shook her head.

'Gervase would never attempt to interfere with the divine institutions of the Church. If you think that, you don't know him. He may marry you. I cannot tell. But he will always know that what

he is doing is a sin, and he will not wish to escape the just penalty of that sin. And do not believe for one moment that he will do anything to make it easy for others to live in defiance of God's laws.'

Kate drew herself together with a quick defensive movement. Lady Brereton's words were strangely in accordance with that unyielding prejudice she had discovered in her lover. He had given her all, the very heart of love ; and yet there was an inner chamber somewhere within his soul to which she might not penetrate. And to this inner chamber Lady Brereton and some others had access.

'Was that what you came to town to tell me?' she said at last.

'Yes.'

'Well, now that you have said it——'

'Ah, but, my dear, that isn't all! You don't understand. You don't see that it is just this love for you which stands between Gervase and his ideals. It is useless to give him something else—the freedom which you glory in, for instance. He doesn't understand it. As soon as he was born Gervase was subject to a rule : as soon as he could speak, his days were marked out by hours of prayer : as he grew older he was taught to guard his thoughts, control his words, order his actions. How can you undo the effects of such an education? You may blind him to what he knows is the truth for a time. But most inevitably, when the glamour of first passion is over, he will see clearly what he has done ; and then—Kate, I

shudder to think of the bitterness of that awakening!'

Kate Souls sat like a stone while the truth of Lady Brereton's words crept through her limbs, a slow poison.

'What impossible thing are you asking me to do?' she said, when she could find words.

'My dear, I am not asking you to do an impossible thing. I am only asking you to love Gervase in the best way a woman can love a man. If you, knowing Gervase as you do, can say to yourself honestly: "This life with me is the best life I can imagine for him, the best life for his heart and intellect and soul"—if you can say that, much as I disagree with you, I shall understand, and I shall believe you and honour your love. Yet——'

'Yes, yes, go on!' said the girl feverishly.

'If you can't say that——'

'You won't believe in me.'

'How can I? Think of what you will have stolen from him—his faith, his self-respect, all that makes him really himself. And in material things, you will have taken away from him a useful life, an honourable old age, when he might have looked back on the fruit of his labour, and a glorious death. What——' Kate lifted a hand to stop her, but, speaking from a full heart, Lady Brereton did not lack words and the sentence had got too far. 'What have you to give him in exchange? What is a love worth from which all pain and sacrifice and struggle have been eliminated?'

It was the younger woman who found words difficult, in fact, almost impossible. Kate was very pale, and her hair lay upon her forehead in damp masses. When her reply came it was disjointed and colourless—no reply at all.

'I am sorry, Lady Brereton, but—I have a headache, I can't go on listening to you. I see what you mean. I see your point. But—would you mind—don't think me rude—but would you mind now—you have said all you want to—there can't be any more—would you mind—going?'

There was silence for a moment, and then Lady Brereton rose.

'My dear, I hope you are not really ill!'

'No—not really ill. Only worried.'

'Then—good-bye.'

She would have kissed the girl, according to custom, but Kate merely lay back in her chair with closed eyes and made no sign. Therefore, without another word she moved to the door.

'Poor child,' she said in a low voice, her fingers on the handle, 'I will pray for you.'

'Pray for me!' The last sentence acted as a restorative: Kate pulled herself upright.

'No, not that, please! I have listened to all you had to say to me without a word. I have borne it all. But, I won't be prayed for. That is what you all say, you religious people, "I will pray for you!" You make a kind of magic by your prayers — by your suggestion, a kind of hypnotic circle which cannot be broken. Gervase was hypnotised by his Mark Hassall, if ever a man was. It was the influence of a strong will over a

weaker one, and you, and people like you, call it—the power of God. Oh, I know! I know! Heathens can work miracles by their fetishes, and so can you! But, Gervase is free now. He is free now of this horrible grovelling creed. Before he loved me he was as much in love with pain as any miserable ascetic of the Middle Ages. But now, in spite of you all'—a triumphant note rang in her voice—'he is free!'

Lady Brereton turned and looked quietly at the girl, blazing now in a fury of suppressed passion.

'Free! Oh, Kate—to do what?'

'To be himself.'

'Do you—really—think that?' But she felt that she could not bear an answer. She slipped through the door and passed noiselessly down the stairs.

'Poor things!' she said under her breath. She remembered Gervase's face—when he had told her the story—half-dogged, half-ashamed, yet lit with an inextinguishable joy. And now—Kate! Ah, poor things! She had not known before that people could love like that. She had been very fond of Sir James, of course, but—well, it had not been like that!

She noticed that a man's coat and hat were hanging up in the hall, and in the stand there was a walking-stick she seemed to recognise. Evidently Gervase was at this house a great deal. She stopped still, looking at them, and reflected; then apparently she arrived at some satisfactory conclusion, for with a little negative shake of the

head, she passed out into the street, looking anxious yet happier.

But in the little room, which during the last few weeks had been altered somewhat to please the taste of another person who had an interest in it, Kate sat pressing her hands against her eyes. The thoughts that Lady Brereton had called up pursued her. She reviewed the past, since the time when Gervase had tried to say good-bye to her and had failed ; week by week she recalled it, day by day, hour by hour. Gervase's wild fits of passion were followed by a wilder sorrow, which he had tried in vain to conceal from her. The closer she held his love, the more elusive it became, until, dizzy and sick at heart, she had begun to wonder what manner of lover was hers, and what kind of worship.

He had come to her, after that first evening of turbulent emotion, in an agony of remorse and sorrow, and he had found her more confident than ever before, with a more buoyant step and a gayer carriage, rosy, glorious, and as fresh as the first wife of the first man. To this radiant creature his sorrow was an insult. He was bewildered and dazzled, and did not know what to think. His bitter words of repentance died on his lips.

But she, loving him, was quick to see that there was a change, and as time went on it was a change which grew more marked. Perhaps she looked, woman-like, for what she dreaded to find, and yet it could not but be apparent to her that Gervase was less eager about his work, that outside events moved him less, that the subjects which

hitherto had roused him to burning indignation now drew forth but a perfunctory energy. Before this he had wearied Kate with the eternal subject of labour legislation, but now she heard little or nothing of it, or even of the committees on which he was working. She became critical and observant; and it struck her that latterly Gervase had let more than one important engagement slip, and that his letters seemed to have fallen into an almost inextricable tangle of arrears. Indeed, the burden of correspondence was a thing that oppressed him sorely, but still she thought—and said so—that an energetic handling of the difficulty would have been preferable to an impatient dismissal. Her words had provoked the first retort she had ever heard from his lips, and that stinging enough to draw her tears. But the momentary occurrence, ending in remorse and renewed kisses, left her more keen to mark the future.

She saw few people at this time. Had she done so she could not have failed to hear remarks supporting her fears.

'What on earth has happened to young Alleyne?'

'That's always the way. A fellow who develops too early is bound to fizzle out. He's done before he's well started.'

Words like these would have brought matters to a crisis sooner; as it was, she had only her own judgment on which to rely. She watched and she waited, and through it all her love grew in power and intensity. Hitherto she had loved

Gervase as a child might have loved, now she loved him as a mother. He was her world and her heaven, the light of her eyes and the dear comfort of her heart. And he was, she could see, oscillating perpetually between two extremes. The black moods, that had assailed his childhood and youth, came to him now more frequently, and were more stultifying in their effect. It was impossible that it should be otherwise. The heart, the kernel of his work had been blighted. All his energies now were at the service of a woman; his heart, brain, and mind were hers, and hers only.

At one time Kate would have desired to be loved in a fashion so supreme; but now, loving for her own part, it troubled her. She felt herself as a drag upon him, rather than a spur pricking him to fresh endeavour; and some day she knew well he would feel that for himself. That was what Lady Brereton had meant by an awakening! Kate saw it at this moment, and the bitterness for her had already begun. She had not needed those prophetic words, since her love for him had given her a preternatural vision. Instead of being an inspiration, the hours he spent with her were to Gervase as an anodyne, in which he might forget importunate thoughts and unfulfilled obligations. Lady Brereton's words were absolutely true. 'He will always know that what he is doing is a sin.' Kate was for him—ah, horrible thought, she covered her face with her hands and tears of misery and shame trickled through her fingers—a temptation, to which he had succumbed. Thus, she thought, had the first

divine exaltation of love been degraded by the coercion of an arbitrary law! She wondered if he still prayed. She had not dared to ask him. He spent his Sundays now with her either at Richmond or at Kew, or, if the weather was bad, in the studio at South Street; but there was no talk of his attending any church service.

'It will not be necessary for Mr. Money to refuse him the Sacrament now!' thought Kate, and the reflection brought with it, oddly enough, considering all things, a stab of new pain. She felt no joy at having killed in him the religion which she so feared and hated, because—she saw it now with a dumb amazement—the whole moral fabric of his character was interwoven with his faith.

And in this discovery she touched the truth. The fundamental difference in their two natures would never be bridged—not even by a love as deep as sorrow and as measureless as eternity, —one must inevitably go down before the other. Kate had judged Gervase by herself; but in knowing him she had grown to know herself better, and what the difference in a religious creed really meant. She had worked harder during these last few weeks than ever before, as she had been surer in her happiness; and her days now held a purpose beyond her art. She looked forward to the time when Gervase would be always with her, when he would be bound to her by the thousand ties of common everyday happenings, and when perhaps another life would come to make their marriage the more indissoluble.

Then there had arisen this strange incomprehensible change in him ; and her love had taken on another form. She desired now to shield him from evil, to protect him as far as she could from sorrow. Even as his love for her had delivered him bound into her hands, so there had awakened in her a new responsibility towards him. She considered his ideas absurd, unthinkable, but it was with the effects of these ideas, in him, that she had to do. Lady Brereton had only put her half-formulated thought into definite words. In reality, even as Lady Brereton had shown, there was but one way in which she might help Gervase by her love, and that was—ah no, she could not define it yet, for the mere consideration of such a thing brought with it an anguish too terrible even to be imagined.

Yet that was what Lady Brereton had come to demand of her : that was what her own heart, stealing a march even on Lady Brereton, had already whispered to her. Love itself now prompted her, for love's sake, to sign love's death-warrant.

CHAPTER XXXIII

EVERYBODY

'I SUPPOSE I must go back to King's Stratton for Christmas!' Gervase hesitated over his words and looked at Kate. The idea of leaving her, even for a few weeks, was one difficult to contemplate.

'I think—you must,' said Kate reluctantly. She also grudged the parting, not because she doubted him—he was bound to her, past even Hassall's praying for—but because the new idea was moving in her mind, growing and gaining strength with every minute that passed, and if it should come eventually to birth—why then, the hours that they would spend together were numbered.

'My aunt wants us to keep an old-fashioned Christmas,' went on Gervase. 'Don't you know the sort of thing — mummers, boars' heads, wassail, and all the rest. The house-party is occupying her at this moment: she has already made out four lists of possible guests, with at least three marriageable couples in each list.'

'And you, Gervase?' said Kate sadly.

'What do you mean—and me?'

'Will there be an eligible lady for you?'

'Three, possibly four. I shall spend my time in dividing my attentions equally between them. I shall present them with the same Christmas present; dance the same number of times with each one; do everything—oh, Kate,' he broke off, 'I am so sick of the necessity for this concealment!' Bending to her, he caught her hands. 'Dear love, next year we shall keep our Christmas together!'

'Perhaps!' She smiled a little sadly.

'What do you mean by—perhaps?'

'The Bill may not pass.'

'The Bill will be an Act next year.'

'Don't be too sure.'

'I am as sure as, that I love you.' He paused a little, then with a change to a graver tone: 'Dearest, that makes no difference. Nothing can part us now. Don't you see that I am bound to you more utterly than if I had married you?'

She shook her head smiling. He noticed that she was very pale, with dark rings underneath her eyes; her eyes themselves were dim with the same sudden, fleeting emotion that quivered in her lips.

'One thing could part us.'

'What?'

'My wish that it should be so.'

He laughed out loud now. 'Then, dearest, I am safe! You see how arrogant you have made me. You belong to me, and you know it.' Stooping he kissed her lips, and found them gentle and a little tremulous. 'What a baby you are, Kate,' he added, in a laughing half-rebuke. 'You used

to be so strong-minded and determined. I loved you for your strength. I always knew that whatever you said you would do. But now——'

'Yes—now?'

'You change your mind a dozen times a day, and you are——'

'What?'

'Just a silly frightened baby, to be taken care of, and somehow—I love you all the more.'

'Ah yes, yes.' Suddenly she clung to him in a kind of terror. 'Love, take care of me. Take care of me! Don't let me go.'

'I won't. I mean to pass my life in taking care of you,' he said, spreading a shielding arm.

'But it is—of myself that I am frightened.'

'There—I will protect you against yourself—all day, and every day.'

Gervase went down to King's Stratton for Christmas, as had been arranged. And Mrs. Willoughby Fairfax worked zealously at her Revival. She engaged a London actor to instruct the village lads in mumming, and an archæologist from somewhere else to give the actor his data. In spite of her efforts the thing was a failure, and Mrs. Willoughby was plaintively dissatisfied. Gervase tried to explain.

'Don't you see, Aunt Judith, that this sort of thing is dead? An archæological joke is nothing but a mummy!'

'Not a mummy, dear, a mumming, a mumming!' insisted Mrs. Willoughby Fairfax, in her clear intonation. 'I am sorry you don't like it. I have worked very hard to bring a little bright-

ness into the dreary lives of these labouring lads, and this is all the thanks I get! They are inexpressibly bad-tempered and stupid. The waits are better: they seem to be getting on, although they don't attempt to rise to any proper spirit. I'm told that they don't want to be called in to drink spiced ale: they would rather have it cold —outside!' Then she wandered off, diverted from her subject by a Stores' list, which a servant brought her in answer to her bell.

'Oh,' she said suddenly, 'that reminds me! We are going to introduce a Cotillon after Sir Roger in the Christmas Eve dance. It's a little innovation, but quite permissible, don't you think so?'

'Oh, quite,' said Gervase quickly, anxious to agree with her.

'Then I may write to town for presents?' (The Stores' list stood explained.) 'Dear Gervase,'—Mrs. Willoughby Fairfax contentedly surveyed her nephew,—'you really are very sympathetic! The way in which you enter into my little schemes for making people happy is quite delightful. Dear boy,'—she came a little nearer,—'I wish you were not so lonely! If only you could find a nice——'

But Gervase knew what was coming. Covering his ears with his hands, he fled, leaving the lady laughing. Mrs. Willoughby, however, was not displeased.

'Perhaps it is a little soon after that first terrible experience!—and yet, nearly two years! Silver cigarette boxes, I think, to begin with.'

She sat down at her writing-table, with the Stores' list in front of her.

Kate's Christmas was also to be passed at King's Stratton. Emma had decided that; and against her mother, Kate's diplomacy was unavailing. She had suggested a Christmas Day in London, and service in Westminster Abbey. But Emma was firm.

'No, my dear,' she wrote, 'I have eaten my turkey and plum-pudding now in the cottage at King's Stratton for more than twenty years, and I'm settled in it, as it were. I could not *feel* Christmas in London. Also, I can't eat the food that Aurélie of yours cooks. I don't fancy her doing a turkey or a plum-pudding at all! She'd stew the plum-pudding, holly and all, like that native cook once did for your poor dear father. So you just come down here, like a good girl—not that I can call you exactly *good*, when you are contemplating committing the awful sin that Gervase spoke to me about the other day. Still, during the Holy Season we will refrain from mentioning it, only I do hope to goodness that it won't make any constraint in our terms with the family!' (By which word it is to be supposed that Emma meant Mrs. Willoughby Fairfax.)

So, with a heavy heart, knowing that Gervase was even at that moment but a short distance from her, and yet all the world away, Kate finally arrived at Emma's cottage.

'Now, you listen to me, Kate,' said Emma, after she had welcomed her daughter, and helped to divest her of her furs; 'but—' she broke off —'you are very cold, child!'

'I'm frozen,' returned the girl, laughing; 'and no wonder!'

Mrs. Willoughby Fairfax appeared to have manœuvred the weather, for outside there was a sharp, sparkling, old-fashioned frost. Indoors Kate thawed gradually before the fire, and Emma took up her snapped phrase.

'Now, you listen to me, Kate! I can't have Gervase down here, while you are with me! Not on any consideration whatsoever! You understand. I've always brought you up to be particular, and I can't have it. You may just as well know that right at the start.'

Kate flushed brightly, but she held down her rising temper with a short laugh. There was no more use in being angry with Emma than with the world generally: both were equally irrational.

'Don't be afraid, mother,' she answered quietly. 'I don't suppose that I shall see Gervase at all while I am here.'

'Well, that's only right,' returned Emma, mollified: 'and it really would be a comfort if you could get him out of your head altogether. Such a disreputable marriage it would be, if it did come off! Fancy you, a daughter of mine, being married like a German, or a low Colonial whose ancestors were all convicts, when you've always associated with the best families of the English Aristocracy!'

Kate's laughter now grew genuine, and the subject dropped.

But during the week Emma, in spite of her promised silence, revived it continually: it seemed

to hurt her to let it go. Kate was nearly distracted by her persistency and its endless reverberating discord.

With a superficial stoicism she forced herself to meet Christmas Day and all the King's Stratton people at morning church. Lady Brereton, she knew, would consider that she ought not to be there, or Gervase either for that matter. Mr. Money would agree with her, but no one else would think anything, for as yet no one else knew. When they did know, Gervase would not be there to disturb their consciences by his presence. Suddenly the idea that was always with her now stirred, as it were, out of sleep and she lost her breath in a quick foreboding. What would that mean to Gervase? Ah, thank God, thank God, nothing yet was decided.

Although Kate and Emma had arrived early, the party from the Hall were already in their places. Gervase knelt, burying his face in his hands.

Was he praying? Kate wondered. For what —now?

As she watched him her thoughts drifted back to her childhood, when, in a sudden passion of anger, he had prayed in her hearing: 'O God, make an earthquake, save me and Kate, but swallow up everybody else, especially Miss Kirkwood.' Nothing short of that prayer could right them now. And yet an earthquake which would swallow up everybody, but especially herself and Gervase, was preferable—that would settle all difficulties.

A rustling among the congregation made her turn her head. Lady Brereton's silk skirts were audible as the Weybourne people filed into their pew.

Emma tugged at Kate's dress.

'Look,' she whispered, 'there's that Jack Denham! Such manners! He's been in the place for three weeks and he's never been to see me! They say he's as good as engaged now to Marion.'

Kate looked up, startled and sceptical, but her eyes confirmed Emma's whisper. She saw before her a man who might have stood for the eternal type of respectability. No garment but a frock-coat, and that Jack Denham's frock-coat, could, in any circumstances, be so inimitable; no human trousers so positive in the assurance of their crease, or so blatantly reticent in their choice of colour. His grey-gloved hand held his glossy hat: his whole perfection dazzled. He was exactly like everybody else, only in an exaggerated degree: it was that which gave him his superb distinction. Kate experienced a new sensation, that of stifling burning overwhelming indignation. It was because of this man, this sleek, complacent, jovial, imperturbable, well-dressed creature, that Mirry's trouble had come about! And now he dared——

She could get no further.

She watched him pass into the pew and seat himself by the side of Marion. Then the General Confession came to her rescue and she was able to bury her face in her muff, while Jack acknowledged in a rich musical voice that he had

gone astray like a lost sheep and had followed the devices and desires of his own heart. He was cheerfully unaware that for him the recording angel had become incarnate.

Kate did not hear the rest of the service, nor did she hear the Christmas hymn nor Mr. Money's kind-hearted exuberant sermon, which embraced even the Jews in its abounding charity.

She sat absorbed in thoughts.

'That's the way of the world—the woman pays the debt in full while the man goes free.'

And then that old trouble that had a counter claim upon her mind obtruded.

'Does the woman *always* pay the debt in full?'

She thought of Gervase. He had surely paid more than his share in that business, as he would pay more than his share if this, her own story, was ever made known.

No, it was not always the woman, but it was always the innocent person—she knew that much—who paid. Lady Brereton had visited her in town to beg her for her lover's sake to make a sacrifice of her love.

'Gervase was married to your sister—is married to her still,' she had insisted; and Kate, in loyalty to Miriam's memory, had remained silent as to the real facts of that marriage. But she would remain silent no longer, for the unexpected sight of Jack Denham had raised a flame of indignation in her heart which gathered force, driven, as it were, by the wind of her own misery.

In the exodus which followed the last hymn Kate found herself so near to Gervase that his coat rubbed her sleeve. There was an eager, ominous light in his blue eyes: he looked as though he were on the point of disclosing their secret to the whole congregation. She passed him abruptly, anxious to get away, anxious also to waylay Lady Brereton before she reached her carriage.

In the churchyard Christmas greetings were being exchanged; and by waiting a moment to inquire of Mrs Willoughby Fairfax as to the progress of the mumming, while Mr. Money monopolised Lady Brereton, Kate was afterwards able to slip unobserved into the Weybourne party. But once there, she was compelled also to shake hands with Jack Denham. They had not met since her dinner-party in Paris nearly two years ago, and now her manner made so great a contrast to her previous cordiality that the young man was obviously perturbed.

'Oh, lor!' he said to himself. 'Oh, lor!'

Gervase had passed by deep in conversation with one of his guests and apparently without perceiving Jack's presence. Now that omission became uncomfortably significant, especially when coupled with the fact that Jack had not been invited to any of Mrs. Willoughby's functions.

'Oh—oh, lor!' he said to himself again—his vocabulary had always been limited. 'After all this time! So like Mirry to die, and do *that*.'

Kate drew Lady Brereton to one side.

'Can I see you?' she said abruptly. 'To-day, if possible.'

That lady brightened visibly. She didn't seem to remember the terms on which they had parted.

'Oh, my dear—have you——'

But Kate knew what she thought, and was quick to undeceive her.

'No, no, not that! Nothing like that. But it's rather urgent.'

Lady Brereton considered. 'Now where can we meet? Mr. Money has arranged carols for this afternoon, and afterwards there is tea, and games at the Hall—but you are going to that, of course?'

'No; mother has a slight cold, I shall stay with her. I am going to be very quiet this Christmas.'

'Well then, may I run into the cottage this afternoon after the carols?'

'That will do.'

'And shall I see you alone?'

'Oh, quite alone,' Kate answered gravely. 'I can promise that. Good-bye. My love to you all, and a Merry Christmas.' She hesitated as though anxious to add something to her good wishes. 'Will you forgive me for my impatience the other day?' Lady Brereton smiled, and pressed her hand in reply.

When the turkey and the plum-pudding had been cleared away, and Emma was dreaming of the Past in her own bedroom—no arm-chair for her on Christmas Day, but a dressing-gown and a comfortable pillow until tea-time!—Kate was free for Lady Brereton. She sat waiting by the little window, looking out at the hollies and laurels in

the garden which bent under their weight of snow. At the end of the short narrow path was the green gate, and beyond that the street with the general shop where she and Miriam used to buy sweets, and sherbet, and air-balls, and dolls with black shiny Early-Victorian heads and no visible ears. Nobody was in the street at this time ; they were all, like Emma, recovering from the effects of the midday meal. At four o'clock the church bells rang, and answering children trooped out to the carol service. Then—'God rest you, merry gentlemen' reached her from the turn of the road which concealed the church. The echoes of the old tune stirred Kate's heart ; it came full of memories, and brought the tears into her eyes. She listened to the carols after that, and forgot to think, until Lady Brereton's knock at the door brought her back to the facts of life and her own difficulties.

Then she forgot all else but what she had to say. Her anger against Jack Denham lessened the difficulty of an explanation. The moment was hers, and indeed more than one story was involved.

Lady Brereton listened to her in an amazement which was almost pitiable, for Lady Brereton's knowledge of life was bounded by the walls of her own home, and when she found herself at fault in her judgment, she resented, even to doubting its existence, the crude fact which had put her wrong.

'Poor Gervase!' she said at last. 'I—it is almost impossible to believe. I feel quite dazed

—bouleversée! It is so extraordinary! And no one had the slightest idea! My poor Marion!'

Kate drew a long breath of relief.

'Then it will matter to her?'

'Matter! Of course it will matter!'

'A great many women would not think so. They would only blame Miriam, and would welcome Jack Denham gladly as a son-in-law. You see, nothing was found out. Nothing can be proved unless Gervase chose to speak, and he would not.'

'Gervase could prove it, then?'

'Yes, Miriam told me that. She signed things —papers. You see, the child might have lived.'

'But that's got nothing to do with me! Oh, my dear, I shouldn't have a moment's peace if—— There, Kate dear, you must let me go now! You did right to tell me—quite right; but I feel bewildered somehow. I don't know how to act. Am I to tell Sir James?'

'That would be best—and leave him to deal with Mr. Denham.'

'But the story is so extraordinary! That seems to make it worse in a way—it is so difficult to understand, don't you know! Gervase's behaviour and all. Some people might not even believe it. Still I am sorry for Gervase, very sorry!'

'Now that you know all——'

But Lady Brereton interrupted her. 'I know what you are going to say, but don't ask me, dear, don't ask me! The Church has never pronounced upon such an extraordinary situation.

Supposing Miriam had not told Gervase for quite a long time! We could never explain all that, could we? And it would put such a lot of people wrong—with that dreadful Bill coming up again and all. Couldn't we ask a bishop?' she added hopefully, 'or even the archbishop? I am sure that he would not mind! Oh, Kate dear, in these matters we *must* be ruled by authority! That is my opinion—you see you asked me. Do you understand?'

'No,' said Kate, 'not yet; but I'm trying to.' She dropped into sudden seriousness: 'God knows I'm trying to.'

Lady Brereton continued to find it difficult to make up her mind. But that she had done so finally was proved by a letter which Kate received from Jack Denham towards the end of the week:—

RITZ HOTEL, PICCADILLY, LONDON.
January 1, 1907.

So that was the mine you intended to spring when you met me on Christmas Day in church!

And who are you to spring it? Everybody knows. You are living in a house that was taken for you by Lord Wareham, and when he isn't there Gervase Alleyne is. If you live in South Street, Park Lane, and are as notorious a person as Kate Souls the artist, you must expect a certain amount of observation! That is all I have to say, except that for sheer bitter vindictiveness commend me to a woman. As for your story, I don't believe a word of it. The thing is simply libellous. Probably it is a tale trumped up by Gervase Alleyne to enable him the more easily to enter into a contract of marriage with his deceased wife's sister! Anyhow, it is a tale which everybody will laugh at.

The child was born prematurely, but in wedlock, and the wife died. That is all. Still I've no wish to rake up the whole hateful business. I have only said what I have because I find you have poisoned the minds of my best friends against me. I suppose you can't help it as you are a woman! God help any man who delivers himself into the hands of a woman, for she will do for him sooner or later—sooner, poor devil, if he happens to love her, and later if he doesn't. That's all. My congratulations to you. J. D.

The letter fell from Kate's hands into the fireplace. She picked it up with the tongs and burnt it.

'So that's what everybody knows, is it! And who and what is "Everybody"? "Everybody" seems to have heard that Lord Wareham helped me to get that house, so of course "Everybody" concludes he paid for it!'

Then her mood changed, and she sat down suddenly and covered her face with her hands. That was a common attitude with her in these days. She had burnt that hateful letter, but the words of it were still imprinted on her mind.

"God help any man who delivers himself into the hands of a woman, for she will do for him sooner or later—sooner, poor devil, if he happens to love her!" Was that true? Of course it was not. Alas! it was only true of men and women caught in the network of a prohibition!

According to Kate's articles of faith, man's true inspiration for all noble and glorious work should be in the woman he loved. Tired with the struggle and the stress of life, he need but fall and kiss her breast to be strong again. Such a

wife could she have been to Gervase—calm, fearless, restful, and infinitely tender, understanding his moods, understanding his difficulties, understanding above all his ideals and the hopes for which he lived. She knew that, even as she knew that she loved him with the most noble impulse of her life.

But there was always 'Everybody'—'Everybody,' who, according to Lady Brereton, 'would never understand,' and who, from Gervase's point of view, should at all costs be 'saved'—'Everybody,' who stood outside, biding the time and waiting always, waiting—to pounce!

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE ONLY WAY POSSIBLE

DURING the next weeks, time for Kate hung breathless as a suspended interval. She did not think much during these days, for her mind was now made up; she only calculated on the opportunity. Gervase had seen her once during her stay at King's Stratton, for she had sent for him in order to tell him how she had interfered with Jack Denham's plans. Her information startled him. He had tried as far as might be to blot out the episode from his mind, and if Jack had never struck his way in life, that young man might never have learnt the truth.

As a matter of fact, this was to Jack the one inscrutable thing in the history which he had gained from Lady Brereton. He blinked over it till his eyes shut.

'Queer fellow!' he said to himself, 'queer fellow, Gervase Alleyne!—always was! Any other man would have had my blood by this time! Good Lord, if it had been me in Gervase's place—married—to *that*! And he knew in Paris—at least, did he know? No, he didn't know; but he suspected, that's it. He was giving me the

benefit of the doubt—jolly cold benefit it was too! Kate didn't know; she hadn't a ghost of an idea until Mirry told her, and then—— Well there, I suppose it was a bit thick to get down here and find me all over the place and Marion Brereton into the bargain! But—how was I to know that they knew? By Jove, the thing beats me! Where would society be if everybody went on like that? Hang it all, a man must know where he is, or he's bound to put his foot in it!'

Early in January, when she was settled in South Street, and Gervase had returned to his chambers in town, Kate knew that she could no longer dally miserably with her trouble. Night after night, lying sleepless in her bed, afraid to think about a pain for which she knew well there would be no healing, she put it from her. But this state of things could not go on indefinitely. Gervase could never change what was part of the very fibre of his being: neither could she change: that was the heart of the difficulty. This love which had lifted her above the ordinary affairs of life was, she could plainly see, dragging him below even the level of common duty: there was no hope in it now for either of them. But the wrench of tearing apart their two lives, which had by this time grown into one, appeared at first to be a thing beyond her strength. And yet—'Nobody can do it but me!' she reiterated. 'Nobody but me! and I—my God, can I?' She knew positively now that after three months of union she would be forced to fight Gervase as well as herself,

and the strain of her irresolution told upon her. Kate was a well-balanced woman, strong and of sound judgment; having once spoken, she knew well that she would not take back her word. That made her decision the more difficult. There would be no escape from it. In due course she reached the final sentence: it was inevitable that she should, and her resolution once taken brought her a certain quiet: tears and all show of grief left her; for it is only happy people, she thought sadly, who can weep. But although her will remained firm, her whole nervous system sank beneath such a pressure of care: she knew what lay before her. She had not attained to mastery over her body, and she grew physically weaker. Headaches, owing in part to sleeplessness, preyed upon her; but this brought its compensation, for then thought grew quiescent, and she found the physical pain an easy thing to endure.

The state of Kate's health puzzled and alarmed Gervase. He questioned her perpetually as to the cause; for every day it seemed she grew paler and more remote from the girl of six months ago who walked in a buoyant atmosphere of laughter and of joy.

One day she saw that there was something in his mind, and the thing he thought became suddenly clear to her by an intuition which pressed home the irony of circumstances.

'Are you quite sure that——'

'Ah, no, no, Gervase, not that! My dear, if a child had come to me I should have had another duty.'

'What do you mean?'

'Another duty than—this one which I daren't face.'

The moment had come.

Rehearsed so often, the words fell easily: she had no difficulty in speech.

Gervase listened to her, stricken by amazement. Then as the meaning of her purpose reached him, he grew violent in his protest, furious in his denial. And yet, even in the whirlwind of this sudden rage, only half the man was evident: he was talking against his own convictions. Kate saw it—it was what she had looked for. Scarcely noticing him, she proceeded quietly, recalling his past utterances, setting forth simply his old ideals, arguing on Hassall's lines as gravely and judicially as Hassall had ever argued, stating facts with a sterner courage than Gervase had ever used towards them. Her own light came from a different direction, she acknowledged that much; but she also saw his way, and it was not hers. At last that still persistent voice, 'without haste and without rest,' became one with the voice of her listener's conscience. Gervase sat now motionless, his face hidden in his hands, while his own soul, it seemed, in the guise of a woman, stood before him and inexorably demanded this sacrifice. Kate talked of the past even as Hassall had done, but tenderly as a woman: she spoke of his mother and of the long years of his childhood, with its ceaseless training and its bitter discipline. Were all those years to count for nothing? Then, as though endowed with a sudden prophetic

insight, she held the future before him—his political career—and in this, owing perhaps to her own faith in her words and to a certain power she had always possessed over him, her forecast did not seem at the moment so improbable when she talked of Bills passed, reforms carried, whole classes of persons benefited. Lastly, she touched upon his inner life—that life which she had only just begun to understand—that life of prayer and of sacrifice of which no man knew, yet which would in truth be manifest in every judgment given, in every cause set forth. Here was reality for him ; here was the heavenly vision he had once spoken of. In endurance, in death, if necessary for a cause, lay for him the supreme and ultimate triumph over life.

Each word brought from him a response ; he vibrated to the tones of her voice as a well-tuned instrument : he felt his heart leap to her as she expressed his own half-hidden faiths.

'But—Kate,' he said at last, 'this is so extraordinary. All that you are saying is what Hassall said ! *You* don't believe in all this : it is not the truth for you.'

'No, it is not the truth for me, but—I know this much—it is the only truth for *you*. These last months have shown me that. Any other kind of life would mean disaster for you, disaster —what would your Mr. Hassall call it ?' she smiled faintly—'damnation, terrible loss ! Dear heart, I love you ; I'm not going to be the one to damn you.'

Gervase moved irritably. 'You are talking

nonsense. No man, or woman either for that matter, can damn another! Besides'—here the unregenerate old man broke loose in him—'I'm damned if I'm going to be saved by you, Kate!'

She laughed outright now, for the remark was so like him; but it struck her at the time how odd it was that they could laugh together at such a bitter crisis in their fortunes.

'No. In a way I'm doing it for myself.'

'What do you mean?'

'Only that, knowing you and loving you as I do, I *can't* do anything else. This is the only possible way for us.'

'To separate?'

'Yes, to separate.'

For a moment he was silent, thinking deeply: then he went on.

'I can't understand how it is that you know so much about me.'

'I love you.'

'But—you know things that I have never told you; things that I have purposely kept from you for fear of hurting you. Since the day I met you when I was going to Oxford I knew that we disagreed fundamentally, and there have been many things that I was afraid to speak of.'

'I know that, and—I know you, my dearest, through and through, heart and brain and soul. I couldn't watch your love for me killing the best part of you—that is all.'

'But even if I can exist somehow without you, what will you do alone? Do you suppose that I could settle down to any work which was worth

anything, knowing that you were suffering and lonely?'

'Oh—me! Never mind me.' She paused, and then added with a half smile, 'I have always my work. It is really a kind of selfishness to send you away from me, for—I am you, in a way.'

He looked up at her. A creature so free of the claims of self seemed to him to be living in a world beyond that of mere human frailties. The knowledge which he had taken a lifetime to attain to, she had achieved in a single flash.

'You said that—almost happily.'

'Yes,' she replied, drawing a quick breath, 'almost happily. It is the only possible way.'

Again silence fell between them, and rested scarcely noticed. Kate's words had sunk deeply into Gervase's mind; now and again a few objections stirred the surface, but as they rose they were settled.

'I—oh, Kate, I can't bear to think of it—I have wronged you, and now you won't let me give you my life to atone for that wrong. You are my wife in all but name. In a short time you can be my wife according to law.'

'I can never be your wife according to your Church's law, and that of your own conscience. You can never break away from the traditions of your Church: isn't it better to break away from what in your heart of hearts you believe to be a sin? But,' she went on with difficulty, 'don't think that you have—what was your word?—wronged—me. I see these things so differently.

My training has been so different. Do I seem—hurt?'

'You seem—— Oh, my dear love, I never knew any one so splendid! If I could only know you would be happy without me! Some day—some day, Kate, do you think that you would ever love again, ever marry?'

She shook her head quickly. 'No, never. A thing as tremendous as this does not happen twice in a lifetime. How could it? But that is just my affair.' She spoke with a complete absence of emotion.

Gervase watched her, still wondering; then he stood up and walked over to where she was sitting.

Of what use talking? They argued in a circle and came back always to the same point. But she, having encompassed even the enemy, had won, although the victory was turned against herself. He would yield to her, though to no other.

'You may be right, Kate. Don't ask me to judge at this moment. All the people I most reverence would agree with you. My dear, if you want—this thing—it shall be so.'

'Yes, I want it,' said Kate very simply.

'It is to be good-bye, then?' A quick appeal was visible in his arms held out to her.

But she made no answering movement. Her face was ashen now, and grey shadows showed on her lips and round her eyes, as she stood motionless before him, almost repellent in her aspect.

'What!' he cried incredulously. 'I am never to see you again, and you refuse to bid me good-bye, to—kiss me!'

'Yes.' She closed her eyes. 'There is to be no going back—this time.' Then with a sudden change of manner: 'Gervase, you don't realise yet what this parting means; it is too serious to play with. This has nothing to say to tears and kisses and the farewells of lovers. It is for ever. It is real. It makes one hard—like Death.'

'Yes,' he said, 'you are hard to-day. I did not know a woman could be so hard.'

'If I am hard it is because—I am not brave enough to be kind.'

'But—ah, my dear, have you looked forward, have you——'

She interrupted him. 'It is the only way possible.'

'You have said that before. If it is true, I may as well go quickly. You see you have taught me to be hard. I will be hard now to you as to myself. There is only one thing more to say—you will not deny me my right to speak?'

'Of course not. Go on.'

'Then, as God lives, whether I ever see you again or not, you are my wife. I, Gervase, take thee, Kate, to be my wedded wife—give me your hand—to have and to hold from this day forward for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, till death us do'—he paused, and added grimly, 'unite: and thereto I plight thee my troth.'

But the girl drew back. 'No, no; I can't. You don't know. You don't look forward.'

'What don't I know?'

'What the years will bring you, and,' she hesitated, 'you—don't know your own nature.'

He grew stern now. 'What do you mean by that?'

'You may marry—later.'

'So what was too great a thing to happen twice in your life may, you think, happen twice in mine!'

She looked at him with clouded eyes, in which there stirred a vague trouble. 'I don't know—how should I? I cannot tell. Men and women are different.'

'Well, I can tell. And I can tell you that you are wrong. You are a woman, and you are talking of what you don't understand. What men have done for religion I can do for love, and indeed now my love and my religion are one and the same. You bid me for love's sake to do what my religion bids me. Till now, love was at strife with a part of me. Henceforward, love and I are one——'

'Well, make me no promises. I could live better without them.'

'Ah, my dear'—his voice sank. 'Do you imagine that I could ever treat the tie between us as nothing? It can never be broken. Marriage that priests talk of is only until death. Our marriage will be until the end of eternity. "Those whom God——" Is there any need to finish it?'

'No. Good-bye. I will love you always, but—you had better go at once.'

'You mean that?'

'I mean it.'

'Good-bye, then.'

'Good-bye.'

Without another word he was gone. She heard the door close behind him, and stood still, holding her heart which hurt her in its throbbing.

And yet—if she had but known it—her own ultimate happiness, as well as that of Gervase, was bound up in this sacrifice. She was but giving, gloriously and out of her own free-will, what Time else would have wrestled from her, leaving her indeed a beggar. And what she gave she still held: for that, owing to the nature of love, was inevitable. But she did not know it—yet. Only in looking back over a long vista of years would she see that the agony of that morning's work was indeed the best thing she had ever known in life. The great surprise of middle age awaited her, the finding that love denied for the sake of love is but love glorified. But to know that now would have been to realise a certain comfort; and comfort in a first sorrow is a thing alien to the scheme of Life, which ordains that each human being coming into the world shall know love, and shall know death, and shall know also, in the days of youth, sorrow unchecked and unmitigated.

'It was the only way possible!' she said to herself. 'Every word he said proved it. He accepted it—almost at once. He agreed. I was just his own conscience. If only—if only he had defied heaven, hell, priests, devils, everything! Ah, then, he wouldn't have been Gervase, and

maybe we should never have loved each other. How sentiment drops before a thing like this! I feel like a stone. Perhaps it is that I have got my crying over. I cried when he left me first, when I thought things might have been different. Now I know. Well, I've done it. I've done the best thing for him, and the rest doesn't matter. There is always work!'

She crossed the room to a cupboard, and opening it, took out a drawing-board and some pencils.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE END

LATER, the following extract appeared in Gervase's diary :—

KING'S STRATTON, *February* 15, 1907.—I have lived a lifetime during the last few weeks. But if Kate does not complain, neither do I. The Mystic realises three stages in his pursuit of the inner light—Purgation, Illumination, and Ecstasy. But I had no will to purge my soul. I was too poor a thing even to surrender it to God unhelped. It needed a woman to guide my hand. Ah, Kate, beloved, you little know !

I have told Wareham the whole story. He understands. He was in Paris the other day. He saw her. He says that she was not unhappy, but kinder, gayer, sweeter than before. She never bothered about her soul : she didn't think she had one : and then at a crisis she behaved like a saint of God and called it—common sense. Well, this is the end—or rather the beginning—for us both. She has followed her light unflinchingly, and in doing so, has left me free to follow mine. But I am infinitely humbled by all that has come and gone.

I think, at the beginning, life finds us with the makings in us of many different characters ; and all our efforts are, helped by circumstances, in the direction of some sort of unity. We are happy if, at the end of it

all, a reasonable soul, a complete individuality, emerges from the contradictions.

It is a great thing to find oneself, but somehow one does not do it alone. Even Kate did not do it alone.

On the afternoon of February 22, 1907, a small group of ladies were seated behind the grille in the House of Commons listening to the second reading of the Deceased Wife's Sister Bill. The debate, which had lasted a long time and which had contained brilliant speeches on either side, was drawing to a close.

Lady Sarah Beverley craned her neck forward.

'I can't see him!' she said after a moment to Mrs. Savile.

'He has just gone out. Poor fellow! I wonder if this Bill means as much to any one else in the House as it does to him!'

'Is it sure to pass?'

'Yes—quite sure.'

'But—even if it does pass——'

'What?'

'I don't believe the marriage will come off.'

Lady Brereton, seated on the other side, did not speak: she was listening intently to the business in progress. A member had moved 'that the question be now put.'

'Why on earth shouldn't that marriage come off?' asked Mrs. Savile petulantly. 'Poor Gervase, life has been hard enough to him. Do, for goodness' sake, allow him a little happiness now.'

'I don't grudge Gervase any happiness!' said

Lady Sarah, 'but I don't believe that the marriage will come off, that is all. I know Gervase very well, and I got to know Kate Souls too in the summer. I don't believe——' She paused.

There was a hush as the tellers returned announcing so many to the right, so many to the left. 'The Ayes have it,' proclaimed the Speaker.

'What is this all about?' cried Mrs. Savile.

'Only a part of their absurd business. They are asking for leave to vote on what they have been talking about all the time.'

Again the Speaker's voice was heard reading the terms of the motion. Then came the order to divide. 'Ayes to the right, Noes to the left.'

There was a murmur as the members rose for the division on the main question. The three ladies in the gallery kept their eyes on Gervase, who had entered the House and resumed his seat after the first division. Something exceptional in the pose of his head told of a certain stress of spirit; but he bore himself firmly, and to them where he sat his face was visible.

Lady Sarah pulled Mrs. Savile's sleeve.

'He looks as if he was seeing visions,' she said.

On the other side Lady Brereton leant forward: she had heard the words.

'He looked like that on his Confirmation day.'

'Of course he is seeing visions,' said Mrs. Savile. 'He is seeing the vision of his own marriage to Kate. At least, I hope he is. I have never told him, but I mean to back him up in that through thick and thin.'

'Hush!' said Lady Sarah.

Now the young man rose and passed from his seat. Crossing the floor of the House, he joined a crowd that was pressing into a doorway under the gallery to the left of the Speaker.

Lady Brereton clasped her hands tightly and shut her eyes. Mrs. Savile turned to her companion.

'He has gone into the wrong lobby—that means——'

'What I said,' remarked Lady Sarah quietly.

'That his engagement *is* broken off! Good Heavens, to think of it!'

Lady Brereton sat silent, clasping and unclasping her hands. She was not surprised, but the actual assurance of what had happened stirred her more than she would have thought possible. She was looking back over her lad's life—his early childhood—Oxford—the tragedy of his marriage—and now—this. Ultimately he had been consistent; this was of one piece with the rest.

It seemed to her to be hours before that division was concluded; but at last the tellers once more walked up the House.

The second reading of the Bill was carried by a large majority. The Opposition for which Gervase had voted was beaten, as all had anticipated.

'Well!' said Mrs. Savile, her wrath trembling into words. 'He has voted against an act of justice, if ever there was one!'

'But—if he believed that he was doing right?'

'He oughtn't to believe that such a thing *could* be right! Think of him turning away to the left

and voting away all the happiness of his life, and of Kate's, just because of Leviticus, or some dry-as-dust old fool of a council. I don't admire it. It's inhuman and monstrous. Whichever way you look at it, the thing is a tragedy! It's worse than a tragedy—it's sheer downright lunacy!'

'But—his convictions——'

'Bother his convictions! He ought to have voted the right way, and lived happily for ever after.'

Lady Sarah pulled on her cloak: she had had enough of it, and was going home.

'Lived happily for ever after!' she repeated. 'If he had done that he wouldn't have been——' Looking up, she caught Lady Brereton's eye in a flash of mutual understanding. That lady finished the phrase:

'—He wouldn't have been—Gervase!'

'Exactly,' said Lady Sarah.

THE END

Printed by R. & R. Clark, Limited, *Edinburgh.*